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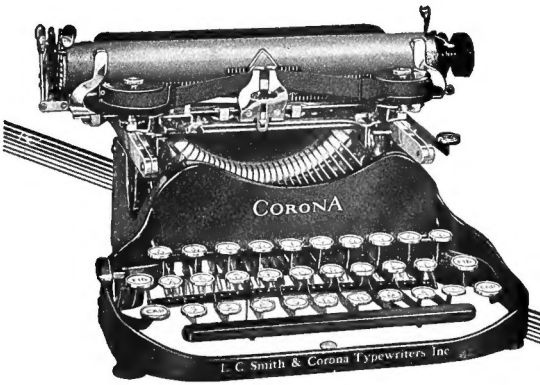

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Love Makes a Touchdown

"You're worth anything —everything to me!"

By HELEN AHERN

BRISK November breezes sent a whirlwind of dead leaves across University Square and whipped the maize and maroon buntings that decorated Fraternity Alley into wild streamers of color. Although the Athenum-Midwestern football contest was four days off, the Athenum Greek letter houses were already gayly trimmed for the big Homecoming game.

A slim girl in a blue knitted sports suit and a tall, athletically built boy strolled across the campus slowly, as if savouring each moment of the other's company. Now and then their hands touched in shy, tender caress.

"I love Athenum at this time of the year and all the football excitement." The girl, Meryl Gardner, laughed from sheer joy.

"And what else do you love?" Neil Wordham bent his wind-ruffled brown head and looked deep into the blue glory of her eyes.

"You!" Her whisper was like a

kiss. His hand closed rapturously over hers.

Silence that was poignant with unspoken love words fell over them, as they passed under the ivied archway that marked the end of the campus.

Their lagging steps carried them on, beyond the cheerful university shops, across the little college town, to a dingy restaurant on the outskirts of the business section. A creaking sign over the door bore the name, "Snack Shop."

Meryl and Neil paused outside. A shadow crossed the faces of both.

"I must go in at once. Uncle Sid will be furious." Yet even as she said it, Meryl's slim fingers clung to Neil's.

"It hurts every time I leave you at this beastly place." Neil surveyed the Snack Shop with rebellious gray eyes. With its dusty windows and curtained door it was indeed an uninviting restaurant. "You shouldn't be waiting on table in a joint like this." His gaze caressed her fragile, blond loveliness. "You . . . you're different."

There was an ethereal quality about Meryl's beauty that baffled description. Her hair, which curled in soft ringlets from beneath her bright blue béret, was a pale, almost unbelievable shade of gold, and her skin had a delicate, mother-of-pearl luster. Only her eyes, deep blue and sparkling as if from inner flames, lent reality to her flowerlike face.

"I'm ten minutes late already, and the dinner crowd will be piling in soon." In spite of herself she sighed as she thought of the boorish throng which patronized the Snack Shop.

Although located on the edge of Athenum University campus, it drew little student trade. Only the poverty-stricken element of the university found its way into the restaurant. The needy student, attracted by low prices, came and bolted down heavy, unappetizing food at the white-tiled tables in the outer dining room. Meryl didn't mind waiting on these customers, but she did hate the loud-voiced, flashy men from town, most of them friends of her uncle's or her cousin Tony's, who crowded into the back room of the restaurant.

Little food was served there, but Meryl carried in tray after tray of coffee cups filled with what Uncle Sid called "red ink." There was always a card game in progress in the back room, lasting far into the night. Involuntarily a little shudder shook her slender figure at the sordidness of her existence.

THEN she looked at Neil and her delicate face lighted. She wondered how she had managed to endure the seven weary years at the Snack Shop before she had known him. She had been just eleven years old when her father and mother died and left her in charge of her aunt and uncle.

She could still remember, with a sick feeling at the pit of her stomach, her introduction to her new relatives. Uncle Sid Lasser, with his coarse, red face and his quarrelsome manner, had frightened her at once. She might have grown fond of Aunt Celia, who looked rather like a faded edition of Meryl's own lovely mother, but Celia Lasser repelled any affection. She was in complete awe of her husband, and seemed afraid to show more than toleration for her dead sister's child. Sid Lasser never allowed Meryl to forget for a moment that she was a "poor relation" dependent on his charity.

"You gotta earn your keep around here, little lady," he told her in the beginning. "The few dollars your

father left won't hardly pay for your schooling."

Meryl had more than once blessed her father's foresight in stipulating that her small inheritance be used to pay for her college education. She knew well that otherwise Uncle Sid would never have sent her to the university. He did it grudgingly, pointing out that his own son, Tony, didn't waste his time on book learning.

It might have been better, Meryl thought to herself, if he had. Young Tony Lasser's time was spent largely in the back room at the card table. He was an unpleasant, sharp-faced youth who followed his father's lead and sneered at what he called Meryl's high-hat notions. He was angry when she repulsed the crude advances of his friends and refused to give them dates.

"Who you waitin' for . . . the Prince of Wales?" he asked her.

Meryl never knew for what she was waiting. She only knew that men like Van Carlock, with his hot, dark eyes and intimate hands, alarmed and antagonized her. In her wildest dreams she had never imagined any one as glorious as Neil coming into her life.

She had neither the time nor the background to make any social contacts at the university. The fact that she was a waitress at the Snack Shop set her apart from the carefree, sheltered co-eds whom she met on the campus. It had been a complete and breath-taking surprise the first time Neil Wordham had joined her after a history class.

Neil was captain and star half-back of Athenum's football team, a university hero. Socially, too, he was prominent, a member of the exclusive Theta Tau fraternity and president of the senior class. Meryl had just stared at him when he asked her for a date.

"But I'm . . . I'm a waitress at the Snack Shop," she said with a proud sort of humility.

"What difference does that make?" He smiled winningly. "You're the prettiest, sweetest girl I've ever met."

Since she had known Neil, Meryl had been ecstatically happy. The love that had grown up between them seemed to sheathe her like a golden flame from all unpleasantness.

"I don't know what I'd do without you." She looked up at him now, her blue eyes shining with pride in his broad-shouldered strength, his gentleness. "You make up for everything."

"If I only could." Neil's fingers tightened around hers and he glared again at the Snack Shop. "I ought to marry you right now and take you away from all this."

Meryl shook her head firmly. "No, dear, not yet. Marriage would mess up your college career and keep you off the football team."

"Football doesn't matter beside you, dear."

"But you can't let down the team," Meryl said gravely. "Athenum's counting on you. Just one more game, too."

"I know." His young face was moody.

"When June comes it'll be time enough to think of marrying."

"I can't think of anything else. I love you so."

The tender cadences of his voice set Meryl's heart to pounding. "Darling!" She breathed the endearment tenderly and then, afraid of his persuasiveness, drew her fingers from his. She knew that it would be unfair to Neil to yield to his entreaties and marry him. In spite of his protests, he loved football and was anxious to get his university degree, now less than a year away.

"But I'll see you to-night, won't I?" Neil halted her imploringly. "You know this will be the last date coach will permit before the Midwestern game."

"If Uncle Sid will let me."

"He'll have to let you. Just think, it will be four nights before I can see you again." He sounded as if it were four years. "I'll be 'round at eight-thirty."

SID LASSER was at the cigar counter shaking dice with a customer, but he looked up meaningly at the clock when Meryl entered.

"I'm sorry," she said in a small voice, realizing that she had wasted over half an hour since her last class.

"Good for nothing . . . boy crazy!" She heard her uncle mumbling under his breath as she hurried to the rear of the restaurant. She sighed. He was in an ugly mood, and her chances of getting the evening off were small, unless she defied him and risked a terrible quarrel.

With the inward distaste that repetition never dulled she made her way through the back room toward the kitchen. The usual crowd were gathered about the round table. For once no one noticed her entrance. Even Van Carlock, who invariably greeted her with insolent endearment, failed to turn around. He was talking earnestly to the group. She caught a phrase or two.

"It's in a bag. Just do your stuff, Tony, and we'll clean up a real bank roll on this game with the odds five to one. Athenum won't have a chance."

Meryl stopped. With a stab of fury she realized that they were betting against Athenum and Neil.

"How can you say such a thing? You know Athenum will win with Neil Wordham on the team." She rushed up to the table, a slim, outraged figure.

The absorbed men whirled at the sound of her voice, and there was something like alarm in the swarthy faces confronting her.

"What's the idea of pussyfooting around behind us?" her cousin Tony demanded.

"I'm not pussyfooting. I was going through to the kitchen." Meryl's blue eyes blazed indignation.

"Oh, pipe down, Tony." Van Carlock spoke in his suave, oily voice. "You shouldn't razz a little honey like Meryl." His dark eyes roved appraisingly over her lovely, flushed face and slender body in the way she most detested. "You wouldn't eavesdrop on your sweet man Van, would you, sugar?" He smiled his slow, insinuating smile.

Meryl did not answer. Already she was regretting the impulse that had made her speak. It was nothing to her if Tony and his hateful crowd lost their money betting against Neil and Athenum. Their wagers and their opinions could hurt neither her lover nor her college. With a slight shrug she dismissed Van's query and continued on her way to the kitchen.

Celia Lasser looked up from the cook stove and spoke in a flat voice. "Better hurry. Sid's sore because you're late." There was neither animosity nor friendliness in her manner. She had the air of a person who has lost interest in life and living.

"I was talking to Neil," Meryl said as she slipped a snowy apron over her school suit.

"Yes?" Celia's tone was unencouraging, but Meryl always felt that her aunt was vaguely sympathetic toward her love affair. She decided to

put her request for the evening to Celia rather than Sid.

"Aunt Celia," she said pleadingly, "could I have to-night off for a date? It's the last chance I'll have for an evening with Neil before the Mid-western game."

"Oh, Meryl!" Celia's exclamation had a hopeless sound. "You had last Thursday night off, and you know how your uncle will rave. You shouldn't ask it."

"Shouldn't ask what?" Tony's sharp face peered into the kitchen.

"A night off," his mother said wearily.

"A date with Neil Wordham?" Tony looked curiously at Meryl, who nodded. "Well, why not? Give the kid a break, ma."

Meryl's scarlet lips parted in surprise.

"But your father . . ." Celia was as surprised as Meryl.

"I'll fix things up with the old man." Tony spread his hands in an expansive gesture. Then to Meryl: "You just ankle along with your heart throb."

NEIL was waiting outside in his low-slung, scarlet roadster when Meryl finally made her escape, clad in her only treasures, a blue crêpe evening frock and gold kid slippers.

"Beautiful!" He drew her to his heart and held her close for an ecstatic moment before he started the car. "I knew you wouldn't stand me up. Have a tough time getting away?"

"No, Tony helped." And then she told him, a little timidly, about a plan of Tony's to join them with his girl friend, Vi, a little later. "Do you mind?"

Neil laughed. "Of course not. If it's going to make things easier for you to throw a party with your cousin, I'm glad."

"You're such a darling." Meryl rubbed her soft cheek against the smooth worsted of his dinner coat in a burst of affection.

"Sweet!" Neil's arm encircled her slender body as the car sped smoothly through the white, November moonlight.

Content in each other's nearness, neither spoke until the lights of the Pavilion, a café just outside the town, loomed up before them. Many of the college crowd came here.

Neil stopped his roadster just beyond the glare of the veranda and put his hand under her soft chin. Meryl closed her eyes and lifted her soft mouth, which was trembling, for his kiss. For a long moment they clung to each other. Meryl's pulses were still racing with honey-sweet emotion when at length they left the car and mounted the steps of the Pavilion.

The crowd was composed largely of boys and girls from the university. Gay greetings rose from all sides at Neil's appearance. As always Meryl marveled humbly over the miracle which had given her the love of the great Neil Wordham. Then they danced, and she forgot everything except the feel of his strong, young arms and the intoxicating warmth of his body against hers.

She remembered now and then with a prick of annoyance about Tony and Vi, but the appointed time, midnight, came, and they had not arrived. They must have changed their minds, Meryl thought with relief. But she had rejoiced too soon.

"There's your honorable cousin and his girl friend." Neil saw them first standing in the doorway.

"Oh, dear." Meryl sighed with

exasperation. Vi, Van Carlock's sister, had never looked more conspicuous.

In a bright green dress that revealed every curve of her body, she seemed a creature apart from the smart collegiate throng. Several couples turned curiously as she and Tony crossed the room.

Her gasp revealed her presence. "Pussyfooting eh?" snarled Tony

"Howdy, old things!" Vi hailed them loudly. "A bit late, aren't we?"

"Too bad." Meryl forced a regretful smile. "Neil and I were just planning to leave. The music has already stopped."

"Oh, that's nothing." Tony snapped his fingers. "Hotter places than this still open. Let's have a set up."

"I'm in training. Can't." Neil shook his head as Tony pulled out a flask.

"One of these sarsaparilla boys, eh?" Tony's tone was insulting. He beckoned a waiter. "Ginger ale set ups for four." Then to Neil: "If you and Meryl want to pass up good liquor, that makes two drinks apiece for Vi and me. We can use them, can't we?"

"And how!" Vi agreed, and giggled loudly.

Meryl waited politely until Tony and Vi had consumed all four of the highballs; then she gathered up her black silk coat and vanity case suggestively.

"Neil and I must drag along."

Tony scowled. "Say, the evening's yet a pup. We're counting on you to ankle out to the 'Owl Inn' with us."

Meryl shook her head. "We can't. It's ten miles out, and Neil's in training and has to go to bed early."

"Going snooty on us, eh?" Vi leaned across the table and scowled at Meryl.

Tony stiffened belligerently. "You can't pull this high hat stuff on me and my lil playmate, cousin mine."

Meryl turned appealingly to Neil.

He spoke up quickly. "Sure, we'll go. I can stand to lose a few hours' sleep."

"That's the spirit, big boy." Vi slapped him on the shoulder.

ONCE outside in the roadster Neil quieted Meryl's misgivings.

"We don't have to stay long, and for your sake we'd better humor Tony."

"I suppose so, but you know the Owl's forbidden to university students."

Tony's heavy black touring car shot ahead. "Follow us!" he called back to Neil and Meryl. "I'm taking a short cut."

His tail light gleamed ahead of them like a mocking red eye, as they raced up the highway. Then it swerved and disappeared into a side road.

"I don't know this route," Neil said, swinging his own roadster into the narrow, dusty detour that Tony had taken.

Meryl shivered. There was something forbidding about the dark, lonely road. "I'm afraid," she said in a whisper.

"Oh, we'll get off this spooky road soon." Neil pressed his foot hard on the accelerator. Tony had already been swallowed up in the darkness. The roadster fairly ate up the miles as they plunged after him, but still they seemed to get nowhere.

Neil grew worried. "Do you suppose we've lost the way?"

They looked for signs of habitation, but not even a farmhouse was visible. No cars passed. Then unexpectedly the motor began to sputter.

"Sounds like we're out of gas." Neil listened anxiously. "But I filled up the tank just before we left."

Even as he spoke the motor gave a last despairing snort. Neil produced a flashlight and jumped out to investigate.

"Not a drop of gas left in the tank." He came back to Meryl, his forehead creased with a troubled frown. "We're stuck."

Meryl clutched his coat sleeve with frightened fingers. "I knew something terrible would happen on this awful road!"

"There, there!" He took her in his arms and soothed her as if she had been a child. "Nothing terrible has happened. I'm here, and pretty soon Tony will miss us and turn around."

"He won't," Meryl said in a despairing tone. She had a premonition that Tony was not coming back.

"At least morning will be along soon." Neil laughed with determined cheerfulness. "Mornings never fail us, you know."

She laughed herself at that, a little shakily, but she felt better. "Hold me tight." She snuggled her pale gold head into Neil's shoulder.

"Always, sweetheart." His deep, tender voice was a promise of safety.

Suddenly she was no longer afraid, just happy to lie in his sheltering arms and feel his lips against her hair.

She must have slept. There was a faint streak of rose in the sky when she opened her eyes.

"Darling, you've held me all night." She sat up contritely. "Your arms must be paralyzed."

Neil smiled down at her. "Blissfully paralyzed," he said, flexing his muscles. "But it's time you waked up. Look!"

Meryl peered down the road and saw dimly in the dawn light a milk truck approaching. Neil got out and waved.

The truck stopped with a screech of brakes and a clatter of tin cans. A grizzled farmer clambered to the ground. "Breakdown?" he asked.

"No, out of gas." Neil led him around to the empty tank.

The farmer inspected it gravely. Then he looked at Meryl's sleep-flushed face and disordered hair. A knowing smile crossed his weather-beaten face. "Guess you two weren't worrying much," he said. "A nail in the gas tank makes a good excuse for . . . what do ye call it these days . . . pettin' party, eh?"

Meryl gave a little shamed cry. Neil's gray eyes blazed.

"What are you getting at? Do you think we drained the tank on purpose?"

The farmer shrugged. "Somebody did."

Meryl and Neil looked at each other, wondering and dismayed.

"'Tain't none of my business," the truck driver said at length. "And no matter how it happened, guess you wanta be gettin' home. I'll sell you some gas if you want, and help patch up the hole."

"Thanks." Neil had to accept the proffered help, although he was still raging at the man's ugly suspicions.

"It's mighty queer how that nail hole got in the tank." Neil turned to Meryl in a puzzled way as they headed for home.

"Do you think Tony could have done it?"

"Why should he?" Neil scoffed at the idea.

MERYL crouched down in the roadster as they skirted the edge of the campus. With the farmer's words still ringing in her ears, last night's adventure had taken on a shameful tinge. She felt mockery and suspicion in every glance. She was worried, too, about what her Uncle Sid would say.

The roadster had barely slowed down in front of the Snack Shop before he was upon them. He must have been waiting.

"What's the meaning of this?" He rushed out and shook his fist in Neil's face.

"We ran out of gas, uncle, and. . ." Meryl thrust herself between the two men.

"A nice story!" A sneer curled Sid Lasser's thick lips.

"But it's true. Ask Tony."

"Ask Tony what?" Tony himself appeared. "You sure slipped a fast one over on Vi and me."

"Why didn't you come back and look for us?" Neil swung over the side of the roadster and faced Tony accusingly.

"Why should I?" Tony's voice was mocking. "When you didn't show up at the Owl, Vi and I figured you'd found more . . . er . . . amusing ways to spend the night."

Neil's brown hands doubled into fists. "You dirty-minded rat!"

"Don't, dear!" Meryl laid a placating hand on his arm.

"Lotta nerve you got callin' my son names," Sid Lasser roared. "You aren't fit to talk to decent folks after takin' out an innocent girl and ruinin' her reputation."

"Sid, you shouldn't!" Celia fluttered up protestingly.

"Please, uncle, don't disgrace me like this." Meryl was close to tears as she saw several students stop to listen.

"Disgrace!" His voice went still louder. "I'm not the one who's disgracing you. This young whipper-snapper's done that."

"What amends can I make, Mr. Lasser?" Neil stepped up to the angry man.

"Marry her, of course."

"With pleasure." Neil bowed. "I'm only too glad to marry Meryl, to-day if you wish."

Meryl's uncle seemed somewhat taken aback. "Er . . . er . . ."

"It's impossible," Meryl cried protestingly. "You can't marry me before the Midwestern game. Marriage would bar you from the team."

"The great Neil Wordham . . . ineligible! What a lucky break for Midwestern." Tony laughed triumphantly.

Meryl stared at him. As if by the glare of a white searchlight, she saw the whole scheme. Tony and his crowd were betting on Midwestern. Last night's accident had been a frame-up. Tony must have punctured the tank, so that she and Neil would be stranded and forced to marry.

"You planned this whole thing," she cried, whirling on Tony.

"Don't talk rubbish," her uncle interrupted blusteringly. "No use trying to find excuses for this he-co-ed of yours. He kept you out all night and he's going to marry you. I'll make him!"

"You don't have to make me," Neil stated. "I told you I'm ready to marry Meryl. Come, dear, we'll do it right now."

"No, no . . . you can't! I won't!" Meryl's voice broke with tears.

"No use of rushing things," unexpectedly Sid said. "To-night will be soon enough. I'm sure," with a leering smile at Neil, "that you won't run off and leave the little girl in the lurch."

"You swine!" Neil's gray eyes flashed. "If you weren't old enough to be my father I'd knock you down for suggesting such a thing. Meryl," his voice took a pleading note, "come with me now. Please, sweetheart!"

"No!" Her face was white but firm. "I won't be thrown at your head. I want time to think things over."

"But when will I see you?"

"I'll get in touch with you later in the day."

"You can see her to-night," Sid said gruffly. "I'll have a preacher waiting, so you'd better be here."

"I'll be here." Neil smiled gravely at Meryl. "Good-by, dear. Remember, I love you, and no matter how or when we're married it will be the happiest moment of my life when you become my wife."

It might have been the happiest in hers, too, had circumstances been different. But to marry him like this!

Sobs rose to Meryl's throat and choked her. She threw herself face down on the bed in her own room and buried her burning face in the cool pillow. She felt cheapened and degraded by her uncle's attitude. Her very soul was seared with shame.

In a frenzy of rebellion she beat her little fists against the pillow. Something very precious and sweet between her and Neil had been defiled. A forced wedding. The phrase throbbed through her brain. She was being hurled at Neil like a common waif. Worse yet, she was being made party to a cruel plot to ruin his football and college career. And some day he might remember and hate her.

At the thought Meryl sat up, her pale face glowing with resolution.

"I won't go to him like this. I won't."

Suddenly animated, she jumped up and drew a suitcase from her closet shelf. With trembling haste she tossed

in clothes and toilet articles, hit and miss. Flight! That was the solution.

Some day when this shame was forgotten she'd seek out Neil and ask his forgiveness for running away. He'd understand.

She gathered up her suitcase and crossed the room with quick, firm steps. She turned the knob of her door. It stuck. She shook it frantically.

A little cry of mingled anger and dismay escaped her. She was locked in!

How dared they? Anger seized Meryl. She kicked at the locked door with the toes of her small pumps. "Let me out! Let me out!" she screamed as loudly as she could.

Steps sounded on the stairs. "Cut out that racket," Uncle Sid growled as he flung open the door. His gross, red face was dark with fury.

"I won't. I'm going away. You can't stop me." Meryl was too incensed at this latest outrage to fear him.

"Can't I?" He laughed unpleasantly. "I'll stop that mouth of yours with a gag and tie you to the bed if you throw any more tantrums Like that?"

Meryl looked at him aghast. The look in his eyes warned her that he meant his threat. She backed away, her slim body sagging with hopelessness.

He nodded as he saw her defeat. "Now be a sensible girl and rest up. Gotta look pretty for your wedding tonight." He winked.

"You can lock me up, but you can't make me marry Neil," Meryl said with a flare of returning spirit. "Not until I'm good and ready."

"We'll see about that." He turned away. "Maybe you won't even have the chance." He looked back over his shoulder mockingly. "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if that sweetie of yours skipped town. I must have had softening of the brain when I let him get away this morning."

Meryl tossed her head. Such doubt of Neil was unworthy of answer. She knew that he would be on hand to marry her, but she knew also that she'd never marry him.

THE hours dragged with leaden slowness. At noontime Aunt Celia came up with a tray of food. Meryl thanked her listlessly.

"I wish I could do something more." Celia touched Meryl's fair hair in a fumbling, uncertain gesture of affection. "I'm awfully sorry about all this." Then, as if frightened by her unaccustomed show of tenderness, she fairly bolted from the room.

Meryl's blue eyes misted. Yet she felt a trifle comforted by the timid sympathy. It was something to have an ally in this terrible household, even a weak ally like Aunt Celia.

The only other interruption came from Tony. About the middle of the afternoon he burst into the room to demand a sheet of note paper from Meryl. She pointed to her desk, not deigning to speak to him.

"Kind of a grouchy bride, aren't you?" Tony laughed at her hostility and helped himself to a handful of the note paper.

When eight o'clock came she roused herself from her miserable lethargy and dressed carefully. During the long hours of the day she had planned she would simply refuse to go through with the ceremony. Even Uncle Sid did not have the power to make her say the sacred words of the marriage sacrament against her will.

"I see the bride's all dolled up." Her uncle unlocked her door at eight thirty.

"The parson's here, too. All we need now is the bridegroom."

"Let me know when he comes," Meryl said coolly. She decided that apparent acquiescence would best serve her purpose.

"If he comes, you mean!"

Nine . . . nine thirty! In spite of her confidence in Neil, Meryl became vaguely troubled. She had no intention of marrying him, but she could not help but wish he'd come and prove his willingness. Her uncle was racing upstairs every ten minutes now to taunt her with her bridegroom's tardiness.

Finally Sid telephoned Neil's fraternity house over Meryl's protests. He reported his findings with glee.

"Just as I thought," he said. "Your cake-eater has skipped. Took a bag and left about seven to-night. You oughta hooked him while you had the chance."

"I told Neil I wouldn't marry him like this. There was no reason for him to run away. You're lying."

"Think so? Well, if Neil's around Athenum to-morrow I'll give you a hundred dollar bill."

There was a certainty about Sid that almost convinced Meryl. Yet it was impossible to think of Neil fleeing . . . from her! And to leave Athenum with the Midwestern game only three days away? Absurd. She'd see him on the campus to-morrow, and he'd explain everything. She silenced her doubts with a fierce loyalty.

HER uncle made no effort to hamper her movements the next morning. Meryl left early for the campus. She and Neil attended the same eight o'clock rhetoric class. He'd probably be in the classroom waiting to speak to her before the recitation bell sounded.

It was a sharp disappointment to find him not among the early arrivals. Meryl took her seat with a curious sinking feeling. She watched the class assemble with growing nervousness. Three of Neil's Theta Tau fraternity brothers came in. Then the professor. The bell rang. Neil wasn't coming.

For the first time, Meryl admitted that her uncle might have spoken the truth, that Neil had really left Athenum.

She fancied that the Theta Taus regarded her from time to time with hostile eyes. Her nerves were jumping. She was glad when the class was over and she was free to hurry to the university post office. In her letter box there'd be a note from Neil. A chill of fear shook her when she found it empty. She wished that she had the courage to speak to the tall Theta Tau who passed her on University Square, and ask him about Neil. He might have been called home by illness in the family.

He might be ill himself.

At the possibility, she turned and rushed after the Theta Tau. She'd met him once at a fraternity dance to which Neil had taken her. "Please . . . I was wondering if you could tell me where I'd find Mr. Wordham."

Neil's fraternity brother gave her a long, hard look. "No!" she said curtly and hurried away.

There was so much dislike and scorn in his manner that Meryl shriveled inwardly.

As the day wore on she met the same look over and over again in the faces of other students. She could no longer doubt that the grapevine gossip system of the campus was at work, and that all Athenum believed she had tried to rope Neil into marriage and he had run away to escape her.

Once she heard a boy whistle, "Here Comes the Bride," as she went by. Her face flamed and then went ashen white.

When her last class was ended she almost ran from the campus.

"How does it feel to be left at the altar?" Tony greeted her when she came into the Snack Shop. He was standing with Van Carlock at the cigar counter, and both had been poring over the *Evening Gazette.*

When Meryl tried to ignore his question, Tony stepped in front of her and held out the paper. His stubby forefinger traced a headline:

ATHENUM FOOTBALL STAR MISSING ON EVE OF GAME

Wordham Reported to Have Left College to Escape Love Entanglement

A little moan broke from Meryl's lips as she read the thinly veiled account. Her knees went weak and she collapsed against the cigar counter dizzily.

Van put out his hand to steady her.

"Keep calm, baby." He patted her shoulder. "You've always got Van, even if your pretty boy has given you the air."

Meryl shook off his offensive hand and straightened herself with a pitiful attempt at dignity. Tears were fighting their way to her blue eyes, but she held them back until she was alone in her room. There she flung herself down to cry as if she could never stop.

"Oh, Neil, Neil! Why didn't you trust me?" He should have known that she loved him too much to force him into marriage against his will. He could have had his freedom, his football glory, everything, if he'd only believed in her.

Meryl pressed her hands to her aching temples and tried to understand and forgive the desperate impulse that had moved him to flight.

THE cautious opening of her bedroom door aroused her from her misery. She straightened up defensively, expecting Tony or her Uncle Sid. But it was Aunt Celia. She came in with a furtive air.

"Sh-h!" She laid her forefinger to her lips and spoke in a whisper. "There's something I've got to tell you, Meryl. I haven't been a very good aunt. I didn't dare to act fond of you on account of Sid, but you're awfully like your mother . . . and she was my little sister . . ." Celia swallowed hard and seemed unable to go on.

Meryl laid a soft hand over the other's thin, work-hardened ones. "I understand, dear. You've done the best you could."

"You've always been a sweet child." Celia recovered herself. "And I can't let Sid and Tony ruin your life. There are limits to what I'll stand."

"Celia!" Sid's voice came like a bellow up the stairs. "What's the idea hanging around up there? There's a gang hollerin' for chow in the dining room."

Celia's face had gone gray with terror. She rushed to the door. "I'm just telling Meryl that she's got to cut out the bawling and come downstairs and get to work," she said to placate her husband. Then, loudly to Meryl, "I mean it, young lady. Get a move on you."

Sid was satisfied. "That's right, old lady. No loafers allowed around this dump."

With regret Meryl saw her aunt leave. She was sure that an important disclosure had hovered on Celia's frightened lips. In the hope of giving

her an opportunity to speak, Meryl dried her eyes and went down to the kitchen. She tried several times to encourage further confidences, but Celia waved her away fearfully.

As she had hoped, he responded at once to her lure

Meryl saw her distress with baffled pity. She knew that Celia lived in constant terror of her husband. The slight kindness she had shown her niece during the past two trying days was her first rebellion against his harsh authority. She was now in a panic at what she had done. She would need time to get back her courage and continue her revelations. Meryl gave up her efforts for the time being.

The immediate problem of facing her schoolmates the next day engrossed her. It would be a horrible ordeal to run the gantlet of whispers and cold glances that would follow the publication of Neil's disappearance. The blood in her veins chilled at the prospect. Yet to stay at home would be a confession of guilt. Besides, the mid-semester finals were at hand, and she dared not risk dropping out. Only by

finishing her college course could she escape Uncle Sid's tyranny.

Morning found her whitely but grimly on her way to her first class. She carried herself like a slim, straight soldier under fire, through the buzz of gossip that followed her around the campus. Many of the students carried copies of last night's *Gazette* and looked significantly from the paper to her.

Gloom lay like a thick fog over the whole university. Even the gay Homecoming banners seemed to have wilted. Dark predictions about to-morrow's game were tossed to and fro. Meryl caught some of them. She fancied that she was meant to hear what she had done to Athenum's hopes.

"We haven't got a chance against Midwestern."

"With Neil gone, they'll smash through our line like the Four Horsemen."

"It's not a question of being beaten, but how badly."

She could feel the hot breath of hatred scorching her. If she had not been a girl she was sure that she'd have been driven from the campus by physical violence.

As it was, Athenum ridded itself of her by more subtle means.

SHORTLY after lunch she received a summons to the dean's office.

She went to the Administration Building with a sinking heart. A call from Dean Meriwell usually meant trouble, and she scarcely knew what to expect.

The dean, a slender, austere man, surveyed her for a long moment in silence, then motioned her to a seat. He came to the point at once.

"What do you know about Neil Wordham's disappearance?"

Meryl's voice died in her throat, and he had to repeat his question before she could falter out her story. He listened with a noncommittal air.

"Most unusual and unfortunate." He put his finger tips together with a judicial air when she had finished. "In fact, I might say, a series of almost unbelievable occurrences. Of course, I shall investigate your theory that the punctured gas tank was part of a plot. However," sternly, "you should never have started for a place like the Owl. In view of that fact and the student feeling in the matter, I shall have to ask you to leave the university, temporarily at least."

"You mean I'm being shipped?"

He bent his head ever so slightly.

Meryl stumbled out into the November sunlight. Slim feet, moving without conscious guidance, brought her to the Snack Shop. Uncle Sid and Tony were nowhere about, she noticed dully. It didn't matter. Even their gibes could not add to her present misery.

"Why, child, what's happened now?" Aunt Celia noticed Meryl's stricken face and followed her upstairs anxiously.

"I've been kicked out of school," Meryl said in a voice all the more heartrending for its lack of emotion.

Some barrier of fear and repression broke in Celia Lasser. She gathered the little, crushed figure in her arms. "Poor baby." She rocked Meryl gently. "I won't let them do this to you and that nice boy of yours." Her faded eyes took on a hard, desperate glow. "I told Sid it was a terrible thing to take him away like that. It was all Van's fault . . . his idea . . ."

"Take him away? You mean Neil didn't run off and leave me?" Meryl gripped her aunt's shoulders and searched her face.

"No, he was kidnaped. Van . . . and Tony and Sid, my men . . ." A dry sob shook Celia's thin body. ". . . They did it. Tony copied your handwriting and wrote a note to young Wordham on your paper, asking him to meet you down by the lake with a suitcase, night before last. When he came a couple of Van's rum runners were there to grab him."

"Did they hurt him?" Meryl's voice was hoarse with fear.

"I don't think so. That wasn't the idea. They just wanted to keep him hidden until after the Midwestern game. They've bet a lot of money on Midwestern."

"But where is he now?"

"I haven't found out."

"But we must!" Meryl jumped to her feet. "I'll go to the police."

"No!" Celia clutched at her with terrified hands. "Sid would kill me for getting him into trouble . . . and there's Tony. He's my boy, my baby, Meryl. I couldn't be the one to send him to jail. I'd never have told you all this if I'd thought you'd go to the police."

"But he ought to be punished." Blinding anger surged up in Meryl. Tony, Sid, Van . . . all of them . . . deserved the worst that could befall them. To have done such a thing to Neil! The fiendish cleverness of the plot.

They had kidnaped him under circumstances that made it appear as if he had fled from her. The punctured gas tank and Uncle Sid's talk of a forced marriage had been only a part of the scheme. Sid had never intended to make Neil marry her. She remembered now how he had put off Neil's suggestion of an immediate wedding. All Sid and Tony had wanted was to start gossip so that Neil's disappearance would be explained. And she had been the decoy!

"Maybe they should be punished," Celia agreed wearily, "but you can't do it. It wouldn't be safe for your Neil." She leaned close to Meryl and added in a tense whisper. "Something terrible might happen to him if you brought the police into this."

Meryl's eyes widened with horror.

"Tony and Sid wouldn't hurt him." Celia was loyal to her own. "But Van might. He's a cruel man. Say you won't go to the police." She wrung her hands imploringly.

"I won't if there's any other way," Meryl gave her distracted promise.

"There must be some other way. We must . . ." She broke off and listened. "It's Sid and Tony. They've come back." She scurried out like a frightened rabbit.

MERYL paced up and down for a long time after Celia had gone. Somehow, some way she must save Neil. She'd got him into danger . . . The horror of it! She who loved him had hurt him. She buried her face in her hands.

Then she straightened her slim shoulders. No time now for repining. She must act. But what could she do? Celia's warning rang in her ears. Something terrible might happen to Neil, if she went to the police.

A smooth, oily laugh floated up through the poorly sound-proofed floor of her room. Van's laugh. An idea came to her. Meryl stood as if petrified while she debated its possibilities. Van was the ringleader of the kidnaping. He would know where Neil was hidden, have access to him. Meryl remembered Van's admiration for herself . . . more than admiration, his infatuation. It gave her a weapon.

She'd play on his weakness, use every bit of her charm, tolerate his flattery . . . even his caresses. For Neil's sake! The blue of her eyes darkened as she saw the sacrifice she must make, but she didn't hesitate. By any means in her power she had to persuade Van to release Neil.

She came down to the dining room a few minutes later, wearing a smooth-fitting, black satin dress, usually reserved for special occasions. She knew that it molded her slim body seductively and lent added whiteness to her delicate skin. She had accentuated the provocative curve of her mouth with lip stick, and her golden hair curled about her small head like a shining halo. Deliberately she passed very close to Van Carlock as she went through the back room.

"Well, look who's here." He responded at once to the lure of her beauty and reached out his hand to stop her.

For once Meryl didn't recoil. Instead she gave him a teasing smile and a glimpse of her brilliant blue eyes between veiling lashes.

"A red-hot honey to-night, aren't you?" Van bent over her as she arranged silver and napkins on an empty table. "Like me a little bit?"

"Try and find out."

"Is that a dare?"

She laughed her low, tinkling laugh. It acted on Van like a long, quick drink. She could hear his breath come faster. His dark eyes blazed.

"Gosh, baby, you're bad medicine for me when you're sweet like this," he said a trifle unsteadily.

"Turn off the heat." Meryl repulsed him with her words, but invited him with her eyes. She marveled at the eternal Eve within her that taught her just how to handle this man. She moved off to appease a waiting customer. All the time she was conscious of Van's devouring gaze.

"Listen, sugar, I've got to see you alone. How about a buggy ride to-night?" He joined her again as soon as she was free.

"Ask Uncle Sid." Her heart leaped. His invitation was just what she had been playing for.

"Consider him asked. I'm stepping you to-night whether he likes it or not. But he won't care. Are you on?"

"Looks like I haven't much to say about the matter, since you've already made up your mind we're ankling out."

Van dropped a furtive kiss on the back of her white neck. He was beside himself with triumph at her apparent submission to his mastery. Meryl's flesh crawled at his touch, but she managed to keep the bright, painted smile on her lips.

VAN hurried her from the restaurant as soon as the dinner crowd had thinned out. "Do you know this is the first time I've ever had you to myself, gorgeous?" He stowed her in the front seat of his huge sedan with a great show of solicitousness and small, daring caresses.

Meryl's little white teeth were set hard together. She was glad of the darkness which hid her loathing.

"Where do we go from here?" Van pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and waved it before her. "The sky's the limit."

"Wherever you say." Meryl's submissive tone seemed to delight him.

"Well, I'm rather keen about the Owl. Snappy crowd, hot music, and plenty of liquor. It's a long drive out there, but I promise we won't run short of gas." He laughed as if at a huge joke.

"Nor get a nail hole in the gas tank." Meryl ventured that much sarcasm. She shook with rage as she thought of the trick he had instigated against her and Neil.

Van shot a quick look in her direction, as if doubtful of the meaning behind her words, but the white blur of her face told him nothing. "Not sore at me, are you?" he asked.

"Why should I be?" Her voice was a shade too sweet.

"Don't know. Anyhow, you can't be sore at this papa." He drew her to him in a gust of passion, "'Cause he's crazy about you, beautiful thing."

"I prefer two-handed drivers." Meryl fended him off in a calm, unhurried way that was infinitely disconcerting.

"You're a cool customer," he said with a mixture of admiration and annoyance, but he turned his attention back to the wheel.

Meryl watched the silvered road wind up beneath the wheels of the sedan. A strange, cool sort of terror gripped her as she planned her campaign. She was deliberately inflaming him one moment, repulsing him the next, but it was a dangerous game. She could not but realize that Van was an explosive, unknown quantity. She shut her eyes to what might happen when he discovered that she had been playing with him for a purpose.

"For Neil's sake! For Neil's sake!" The motor seemed to hum out the phrase. She had no choice but to go on.

"Owl Inn." Van drew up in a parking space to one side. "And now for a little foot and lip warmer." He took a flask from his pocket and handed it to Meryl. "Sweeten it for me, baby."

Obediently she raised the liquor to her mouth, but drank nothing.

Van took a long swig, then snatched her to him. "Nothing like a little kiss after a little drink, so come across."

Meryl felt for an awful moment that she was going to faint as his wet, hungry mouth found her icy lips.

"Gosh, can't you warm up a bit?" He released her with a disappointed air. Then he took another drink and seemed to feel consoled. "Guess you need a red-hot papa like me to teach you how to kiss," he said, chuckling.

Meryl reached over and unlatched the door of the sedan. "I thought we came out here to dance." Every fiber of her body recoiled at the thought of further kisses. She jumped from the car.

"Don't mind shaking an ankle for a bit," Van allowed good-naturedly.

MERYL had never before seen such a party as was in progress at the Owl. Men and girls in various stages of intoxication staggered about the tiny dance floor to the wild rhythm of a piano and banjo. Bottles stood unconcealed on small tables lining the walls.

Involuntarily Meryl shrank back.

"Good crowd to-night." Van did not notice her misgivings. He was looking over the room with an approving air. Several of the dancers stopped to hail him by name. He seemed a figure of importance in the place. Two waiters rushed up, seated him at a ringside table, and whisked off the soiled tablecloth.

"Name your poison, baby. You can get bunnied to-night on any kind of giggle water your little heart desires."

She claimed a preference for gin and white rock. Van scoffed the combination, but she persisted. The drink would make a colorless mixture that

could easily be disposed of in the bowl of cracked ice. She would need a cool, clear head as never before, if she were to win her desperate game.

Van ordered Scotch straight, and caught two quick ones in rapid succession. Meryl toyed with her own highball until he turned to speak to a friend, and she had the chance to pour it out.

"You're a good drinker." He beamed when he saw her empty glass. "How about another?"

"Not right away. You don't want to carry me home."

"I'd like to carry you some place, but not home." His voice was thick with liquor, and the mounting flame of his desire.

When they rose to dance he held her as if he would crush her soft body into his. Meryl was becoming more and more frightened. She remembered a fairy tale of childhood, about the princess who had opened a box and released a genie that grew and grew to horrifying proportions. Van's passion threatened to become just such an uncontrollable force.

The wild, hungry light in his eyes burned hotter and hotter as the evening wore on. He was drinking steadily, and his step became too uncertain for the dance floor. Meryl managed to dispose of three highballs in the ice bowl. Van was no longer paying any attention to what she drank. His one thought seemed now to touch her. He hitched his chair close and dropped one arm heavily about her slender shoulders.

"I'm crazy about you, Meryl." He thrust his dark face into hers.

"How crazy?" Meryl asked softly. She felt like a runner who has heard the starting gun. The moment to strike was at hand.

"So crazy I'd do anything for you, gorgeous." His hands strayed up the smooth whiteness of her arms.

"Anything?" Meryl forced her reluctant head to drop to his shoulder. She gave him a long, upward glance.

Inside her a little voice was whispering, "For Neil!" She mustn't think of herself, just Neil who was imprisoned, perhaps in danger.

"Even if it cost you a lot of money?" She stood without a shudder the smothering pressure of his arms.

He laughed. "You cute little golddigger. Want a diamond bracelet?"

"No, nothing like that." She hesitated, drew a long breath, then plunged ahead. "I want you to release Neil Wordham so he can play in the Midwestern game to-morrow."

VAN'S arms relaxed. Meryl was terrified by the change that came over him. At her words intoxication dropped from him like a discarded garment. His dark eyes sharpened and became gimlet points that bored through her.

"So that's what you're up to," he snarled. He shoved her from him and then almost in the same movement jerked her back again. "You don't think you're going to get away with it, do you? Anyhow, what makes you think I know where your sweetie is?"

"You know!" Some untapped well of courage enabled Meryl to meet his angry glare without flinching.

"Maybe I do, but I'm not telling. No cutie's ever put anything over yet on Van Carlock."

"You were just kidding, then, when you said you'd do anything for me?"

There was a tense, heavy moment of silence, in which he stared at her. "I might even do that for you," he

said at length. Her heart gave a wild bound. "But I'd expect something in return."

An icy paralysis seized her as she read his meaning. She wet her dry lips. "What do you want me to do?"

"Marry me!" He snapped out the words. "As soon as you're my wife, I'll see that young Wordham's set free. I'll lose money, but you're worth it." His eyes fairly devoured her golden beauty.

Meryl gasped. Her whole body had gone limp at the horror of his suggestion. "I . . . I can't!" The words were wrung from her.

"Oke with me." Van shrugged. "But it's a tough break for Wordham." He was watching her white face. "Now that you're hep to what's up, it won't be safe to let him go. Don't know just what we'll have to do with him."

Meryl's little fingers gripped the table edge until her knuckles showed white. "You wouldn't dare to hurt him. I could have you arrested. I . . ."

"Cut out the hard talk." His face had grown sinister. "Just try anything like that and see how far you'll get. I've got a lot of influence in this town, and I could have you sent to the nut house as a cuckoo if you spill any wild chatter. We could blame young Wordham, say that the dirty deal he pulled on you threw you off your base. We might even get out a warrant for him. Then no one would be surprised if he were found floating down the river. Plenty of fellows bump themselves off when they get into trouble with a dame."

"You'd murder him?" Meryl stared, aghast at the cruelty and evil written in Van's face. "No, no!" She put out her hands as if to ward off a physical blow. "I won't let you. I . . . I . . ." Her voice broke. Then, gathering all her strength, she said slowly, but unwaveringly: "I'll marry you, if that's what you want."

"For Neil!" The ghost-like voice spoke in her heart.

"To-night?" Van's dark eyes gleamed with a savage exultation. His vise-like arms pressed her to him possessively.

"Not to-night. Not until Neil is free."

"How you trust me!" His mocking smile flashed forth.

"There's no reason why I should." Scorn edged her voice.

He laughed mirthlessly. "But you expect me to trust you. How do I know that once your precious Neil is loose you won't give me a nice, large chunk of atmosphere."

"You'll have to take my word. I've never broken it yet," Meryl said proudly.

He studied her for several seconds. "I guess you're on the square. I'll take a chance. Listen, here's the dope. I won't dare free Wordham until just before the game to-morrow. That'll give you and me time to get out of town before he squawks, and before your uncle and Tony and the rest of the gang find out I've double crossed them. There's a train leaving for the Twin Cities at two fifteen, just the time the game starts. You can call the stadium from the depot and make sure Wordham's there before we go. We'll be married in the Cities. How's that?"

"It sounds all right." Utter hopelessness settled over Meryl as she saw the trap closing.

"Don't let Sid and Tony suspect what I'm up to. They'd beat me into a pulp if they knew I was letting Wordham out in time to play."

It was arranged before they parted

that night for Van to pick her up at the Snack Shop around two o'clock the following afternoon. He figured that Tony and Sid would be at the stadium by that time placing a few last minute bets on Midwestern.

"And you'll be mine before another night passes." Van's voice rang with wild glee. He brushed back her fair hair from her face and appraised her pale beauty with the pride of ownership. "Mine!" His seeking lips poised over hers.

"Not yet." Meryl wrenched herself free.

"But to-morrow! I have your word . . . remember!" His insistent voice was a knell against her brain.

NUMBNESS held her as she climbed the stairs to her own room. She felt strangely unreal. It could not be she, Meryl Gardner, who had promised to marry Van. Such things didn't . . . couldn't happen. She undressed with the precise movements of a sleep-walker and lay down. For hours that seemed eternity she stared into the darkness, while the events of the night passed through her tired mind. She felt no desire to cry. It was as if the last tear she would ever shed had been squeezed from her burning eyeballs.

Morning came . . . a golden, crisp November morning. "Happy the bride the sun shines on." The old adage flashed through Meryl's mind and she laughed aloud with a touch of hysteria.

She went downstairs early and plunged into the routine of the kitchen. She wanted to keep busy. If she had time to think she'd go mad. Aunt Celia puttered worriedly over the stove.

"Decided what you'll do about . . . about young Wordham?" she asked under her breath.

"He'll be free to play this afternoon." Meryl found faint comfort in her own prediction.

"You didn't go to the police?" in a panic. Then, as Meryl shook her head, "But how . . ."

"You'll understand later." This was all Meryl would say.

"Great football weather." Sid Lasser came in with a sardonic grin for his niece. "But I suppose you aren't interested in football since your handsome hero headed for parts unknown?"

"You'd be surprised how interested I am in the game this afternoon." There was a wild gleam of triumph in Meryl's blue eyes, as she thought of the surprise in store for this complacent plotter when Neil Wordham lined up with the Athenum eleven that day.

Mechanically Meryl helped her aunt make sandwiches and wash dishes, but her eyes were never far from the fast-moving hands of the kitchen clock. Never had hours slipped by so relentlessly. Ten, eleven, twelve, one! Just an hour left. She wanted to scream. She knew how a prisoner in the death house must feel. One thirty! She heard her uncle and Tony leave the Snack Shop.

"I must go now." Meryl dried the dishwater from her hands.

Celia Lasser peered at her, caught by the complete despair in the young voice.

Meryl's dragging steps carried her up the stairs. She took out her suitcase. She stared down at it, realizing that she was packing for her wedding trip. For the first time she fully sensed the horror ahead. She swayed dizzily. There was a pounding in her ears. She sank into a chair and felt the blessed relief of faintness creep over her. Somewhere a clock chimed

the quarter hour. The sound recalled her. A quarter to two. In just fifteen more minutes Van would come to demand fulfillment of her promise. She struggled to her feet.

"Where are you going?" Aunt Celia opened the door and stopped short at the sight of the half packed suitcase.

"On my honeymoon." Meryl's wild, discordant laughter cut across the room as she folded a piece of lingerie and laid it in the bag.

"With Neil?" Aunt Celia's face lighted with hope.

"No, with Van Carlock." Meryl spoke more calmly. She decided to tell Celia the truth. She owed her that much. Celia had been kind according to her lights. "He's releasing Neil," she said.

"You mean you're marrying him as the price?"

"Something like that," wearily.

"But, child, he's a crook!" Celia was horrified. "It was Van Carlock who got Tony and Sid mixed up in bootlegging and gambling. You'd better be dead than married to him."

"I know, but I've given my word."

"I won't let you." Celia looked fierce and determined.

"You'll have to, dear." Very gently Meryl disengaged herself from her aunt's grasp. "And I must hurry now. We're catching the two fifteen to the Cities."

An automobile horn sounded outside. "He's here." Meryl closed and strapped the suitcase. "Good-by, dearest, and thanks for everything." Her lips brushed Celia's faded cheek. Then she picked up the bag and went downstairs before the hard calm that was sustaining her could break. She fancied she heard Celia call her name, but she didn't stop.

"Your bridegroom waits impatiently." Van stepped out of the sedan and took her hand with a burlesque bow.

Meryl shivered and dropped into the seat. Van leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur who to-day had the wheel.

"Drop us off at the station and then head for the Cities." He turned back to Meryl. "If any one tries to follow us they'll find the car gone and never think of looking for us on the train."

MERYL heard him indifferently. From the moment she had stepped into the sedan she felt as if the trap had closed. She had given her promise. There could be no rescue for her. She sat stiff and cold in one corner of the seat, as if the rigidity of death itself had descended upon her. Only when they whirled past the stadium, into which the football throngs were pouring, did she show any animation.

"Neil?" She bent hard, questioning eyes on Van.

"He should be there now," he said. "You can call up as soon as we get to the depot and make sure."

It was just ten minutes past two when they pulled up at the little station. Van pointed to a telephone booth. "Go on, ring up training quarters and you'll find I've kept up my end."

Meryl crossed over to the booth, but before she could step inside a young man wearing a newspaper reporter's badge on his hat rushed into the depot.

"Big news!" He stopped by the telegraph operator's desk. "Neil Wordham's back. He's going to be in the game. What a story!" He began dictating to the operator.

"Satisfied?" Van grinned as Meryl turned away from the booth.

She nodded, glad that Neil was safe . . . at least as glad as a person whose heart was dead could be.

Van purchased two tickets and consulted his watch. "That infernal train is late. Never can depend on these locals." He fumed up and down the waiting room. From the direction of the stadium came a great roar of voices. That meant that the game had started. Across Meryl's mind flashed a picture of Neil in his football togs. She could see him on the field, tall and strong and glorious. A blinding stab of anguish penetrated her numb misery.

"At last!" Van seized her arm and hustled her toward the gate as the Twin Cities train puffed up to the station.

"All aboard!"

The engine snorted. Wheels turned . . . slowly, then faster and faster. From a Pullman window Meryl saw the landmarks of Athenum slide by.

"No sob stuff!" Van swung her rudely around until she faced him. "I don't want any red-eyed bride."

Meryl blinked back the tears that had risen scaldingly to her eyes. "I'm not going to cry," she said with a flash of pride.

"Good, and you'd better try smiling a bit." Van seemed to glory in his power over her. "I'm fed up on all this gloom."

"I'm afraid you'll have to take me as I am." Meryl's blue eyes darkened with disdain at his bullying tactics.

"Pretty fresh, aren't you?" he sneered. "But just wait until we're married."

She cowered before the threat in his ugly smile.

The train had gathered speed. It left behind the automobiles which tore along the highway bordering the tracks. Farmhouses and autumn stripped fields appeared and disappeared. Each turn of the wheels brought nearer the moment when she would be a wife. Van's wife. Meryl's finger nails cut into her palms as she struggled for calm.

"Now, what's up?" Van looked out of the window irritably as the train pulled up at a wayside station, so tiny that it did not even boast a depot. "Even a local hasn't any right to stop at every watering tank." His impatience grew as the wait stretched to five, then ten minutes. He yelled at a conductor. "What's the big idea?"

"Orders from the station master." The conductor moved on.

Meryl welcomed the delay. She wished the train would never start. She gazed out at the peaceful countryside with a sense of respite.

Suddenly a scream rose to her throat. She choked it back and pressed her startled face against the glass. She must be dreaming. Perhaps she had gone mad. It couldn't be Neil, Neil just as she had imagined him in his football suit, who was leaping from his red roadster!

His gray gaze swept up and down the train and found the small, white face against the window. As their eyes met Meryl knew that he was real. Neil had come!

She saw him rush for the train steps, vanish.

A second later he was tearing down the Pullman aisle. Van jumped to his feet with an ugly oath. His right hand slid under his coat. Meryl screamed, just as Neil's fist shot out. It caught Van on the chin and he collapsed like a pricked bag. A revolver clattered to the floor. Neil pocketed it.

"I'll get you for this, Wordham." Van sat up groggily.

"Lay off the threats." Neil's fist clenched again. "You're licked, Carlock." Then, disregarding Van's glare, he stretched out his hand to Meryl. "Come, dearest."

She rose tremblingly. Van jerked her back. "You can't walk out on me, baby. You promised to marry me."

Meryl wavered. Her blue eyes sought Neil's in desperate appeal. "I gave my word," she said simply.

Neil bent over Van. "You tell Miss Gardner right now that you release her from the promise you terrorized her into."

"Who's giving orders?" Van recovered some of his insolent assurance.

"I am. I've got you where I want you. If you don't release her you're coming back to Athenum to face charges for kidnaping. Take your choice." Neil's voice was like the crack of a whip. "Go on alone or return to be arrested."

"Aw, beat it." Van motioned Meryl from him. "I might have known a dame would bring me nothing but trouble."

"It's all right, sweetheart. You're free of your promise." Neil took Meryl's small hands in his. Like a frightened child, she clung to him as he led her from the train. With infinite tenderness he lifted her into the roadster, holding her for a moment to his heart.

"And now for Athenum and the stadium!" Neil laughed like a boy as he stowed her into the seat and settled himself behind the wheel. Like magic, care was erased from his young face.

MERYL cuddled close to him as the red roadster headed for Athenum. She lay in a happy trance, her head resting against the firm security of his shoulder.

"I still can't believe that you're here and I'm here." She lifted dreamy, wondering eyes to his.

"Very much here . . . thanks to your Aunt Celia."

"I don't understand."

Neil's hand sought hers.

"I'd better tell you the whole story, though you know part of it already." With his gray eyes fixed on the road, he told her how, two nights ago, he had gone to the lake shore in answer to a note signed with her name. "Lover's Lane," the famous shore walk, was a favorite meeting place of college students and he had suspected nothing amiss.

He had been taken by surprise by two ruffians, knocked unconscious and carried blindfolded to some place in the country.

"A road house, I think. I could hear jazz downstairs at all hours."

"The Owl Inn!" Meryl remembered the shuttered upper windows of the place as she had seen them last night with Van.

"Very likely," Neil said thoughtfully. "Anyhow, they kept me there bound and gagged until this afternoon, when a couple of roughnecks came in, blindfolded me again and took me away in a car. They dropped me somewhere along the road and were out of sight before I could get my eyes untied. I hitched a ride into town from some farmer, found it almost time for the game to start, so I went directly to the stadium. I had no idea that you were in any danger, not until your Aunt Celia busted in and told me what you'd done . . . were doing . . . for me. I made a bee line for the depot, but the train had already pulled out. I had the station master wire ahead and hold it. The rest you know. But, Meryl sweet," he looked down at her

with tender reproof, "you must have been mad to think of marrying such a creature as Carlock! I wasn't worth a sacrifice like that."

"You're worth anything . . . everything to me," she said simply.

"My wonderful girl." Regardless of the fleeting moments, of the football game, of all the world, Neil stopped the car to press her slim body to him and bury his face in the golden fragrance of her hair.

"Dearest, you wanted me to get to the stadium." Meryl remembered and stirred in his arms.

"I don't want to do anything but love you," he started the car again, "but the team may need me."

The roadster raced ahead. Not until they reached the outskirts of Athenum and passed the Snack Shop did either speak. At the sight of the familiar restaurant a terrible fear awakened in Meryl.

"Aunt Celia . . . what about her? Uncle Sid will kill her if he finds out what she did to help us."

"I'll settle with your Uncle Sid and Tony, too." Neil smiled a trifle grimly. "I'll scare them with a threat of arrest until they're two tame bad men. I've got the goods on your uncle for kidnaping and embezzlement besides."

"Embezzlement?" Meryl was puzzled.

"Gosh, I forgot." Neil slowed up for a stop-and-go sign and took the chance to explain. "Your uncle's been using money that belonged to you. Aunt Celia made a clean breast of everything. You're really quite an heiress, sweetheart."

"I could never be any richer than I am now." Meryl rubbed her cheek against his jersey.

"Sweetest girl in the world." He had to be content with kissing her with his eyes, for just then the stadium rose up before them.

NEIL stopped the car at the nearest gate. "What's the score?" he called to the ticket taker.

"Seven to nothing in favor of Midwestern and almost the end of the first half."

Neil sprang from the car. "That means I'll have to make a couple of touchdowns for Athenum and you," he said to Meryl. "I'll take you to a seat and get down to quarters in time to start the second half." He rushed her through the gate and up the cement steps of the grand stand so fast that her small feet scarcely touched the ground.

At the magic name of "Wordham" an usher motioned them to the honor box, where sat the university president, Dean Meriwell, and the more important alumni. Meryl faltered at sight of the dean's frozen stare, but Neil rushed her inside the box. He went directly to the president and said something to him and Dean Meriwell. Instantly the latter's expression changed.

"Sit right down, Miss Gardner." He motioned Meryl cordially to a seat between him and Prexy.

"See you after the game." Neil's hand touched hers in a fleeting caress and he was gone.

Meryl sank into her seat dazedly. Her head still whirled with the emotions and adventures through which she had just gone. Dimly she heard the dean apologizing for his unjustness and the president explaining the first half of the game.

"Midwestern is beating us badly. They made one touchdown in the first quarter and the ball was theirs on our five-yard line at the end of the half."

Prexy looked gloomy. "I'm afraid even Wordham can't save us now."

"Neil can do anything." Meryl's voice rang with utter confidence in her lover.

And from the moment the second half started her faith was justified. With Neil in the game, the tired, disheartened Athenum eleven became a fighting machine. Neil himself played with the fury of ten men.

"You were right. He can do anything." The president turned to Meryl beaming with enthusiasm, when from his own twenty-yard line Neil caught a forward pass and carried it down the field for the first Athenum touchdown.

The home stands went mad. "Neil . . . Neil Wordham!" His name went up in a great roar, while hats and programs filled the air.

The third quarter ended with a seven to seven tie.

Athenum was jubilant with new hope, but the fourth quarter moved more slowly. The Midwestern eleven, recovering from their first astonishment at the terrific onslaught, put up a stiff defense. Again and again Neil tried to break through their interference, only to be stopped by tacklers. The ball see-sawed back and forth between the two teams.

"Touchdown! Touchdown! Just one more, Wordham!" All Athenum was on its feet begging their hero to score, as the end of the quarter and the game drew nearer and nearer.

"Come on, Neil!" Meryl, caught up in the football spirit, called to him.

It seemed almost as if he heard her plea, for at just that moment Neil scooped up a Midwestern fumble, shook off the tackler who dived for him, and, twisting his way through a baffled interference, ran forty yards for a second touchdown and victory!

The referee's whistle sounded. It was over. Above the wild cheering rose the exultant strains of Athenum's band. Football fans surged for the field. Meryl had a moment of panic. It seemed impossible for Neil to find her in this mad mob. Then just ahead of her rose a great cry.

"Gangway! Gangway for Wordham!"

Neil was coming toward her, his gray eyes shining. He had discarded his football helmet and his brown hair was blown in boyish disorder. He held out his arms.

"Darling, I'm so proud of you." Meryl's face was radiant with pride as she went to his embrace.

"Both of those touchdowns were for you, dear, and I'm going to carry you off some place where I can be paid properly. I demand at least ten kisses for each."

Meryl laughed softly. "Why not a hundred?" And she raised scarlet lips that were eager to begin the payment.

Peter stood bewildered as she dashed out of the room

Holliday Hearts

The Romances of the Holliday Family—Romance Three

MARJORIE'S HOLLIDAY

By ETHEL DONOHER

THE Holliday house was in a state of gala confusion. Nancy, the elder of Sarah Holliday's two unmarried daughters, was to be married to-morrow. Nancy's sister Theodora, who was now Mrs. John Weston, was to be the matron of honor. Sunny, Nancy's younger sister, and Marjorie Shaw, her best friend, were to be the bridesmaids.

The groom was Colin Hunt, the happiest man on earth, and the best man was the bride's brother, Peter Holliday.

It was to be a church wedding with a reception afterward in the old Holliday house in Roselle Park.

"You'd know Nan would do something like this," Peter complained whimsically, when the family and Marjorie Shaw had gathered in the living room shortly before dinner. "I hope," he continued, "that when Sunny gets married she'll sneak off with the iceman, or do something considerate like that, to spare the wear and tear on her adoring but frazzled family. We've had two weddings in this

house lately, you know: First Theo's, and now this cyclonic affair."

Sunny, not long out of high school, and not yet earning her living, glanced up from the blue garters she was making for Nancy, dashed the pale-gold curls back from her face, and regarded Peter with indignant blue eyes.

"Well, I'm *not* going to sneak off with the iceman nor anybody else," she retorted. "When *I* get married I'm going to have the biggest wedding we've ever had in this family; so don't make any mistake about *that*."

Her brother groaned.

"Why did you have so many daughters, anyway, mother?" he plaintively inquired. "Now, if you'd had five sons they wouldn't have wanted to tear your house all up like this. When they got ready to be married they would have taken the girl off in a respectable fashion to a nice, quiet church—"

"And afterward," Sunny scornfully interposed, "I suppose they'd have taken their brides into a drug store and bought them nice ice cream sodas."

"Sure," Peter agreed. "Or they could have ginger ale, if they preferred it. Men know how to do things like getting married without wearing themselves out—not to mention their families."

"Much good it does them if they do know," his mother remarked with quiet humor. "I never heard of a man yet who really wanted a big wedding. But, as you have observed, they not infrequently have them—"

"'All for the sake of a girl!'" Sunny quoted wickedly.

"And then," Nancy joined in, sitting up suddenly in the winged chair she was occupying, "when a man *is* having a big wedding, he gets just as much fun out of it as Colin and you, too, Peter, are getting out of this one."

"What?" said Peter in pained surprise. "Do you really think *I'm* getting any fun out of this earthquake?"

"No, I don't think anything about it—I *know* you are. You can hardly wait to open every wedding present that arrives. You have a perfect fit if I make you wait until Colin comes so that we can all open the box together. Of course you're enjoying it! You're having the time of your life. When mother presented you with three sisters, young man, she provided you with a lot of fun."

"All right," said Peter, "have it your way. I simply dote upon you, and there's nothing I like better than a great big splashing wedding. I even wish that mother had had twelve daughters!"

"So do I," Sarah Holliday told them with something of wistfulness in her wise, kindly face. "I have lost two of my girls—"

"Oh, mother," Theo protested, "you haven't lost me, and you never, never will!"

Mrs. Holliday smiled reassuringly upon her.

"No, dear, of course I haven't really lost you. But, you see, you don't live here any more—and now Nancy won't, either."

"But I'll be right near you, darling," the bride-to-be pointed out. "I'll see you every single day."

"I know, and I'm grateful enough to have you both so near. What I'll miss, though, is not having you all here to meals. There'll be only Sunny and Peter and me. And I don't want anybody to talk to Sunny about her getting married. She's just a baby—"

"Mother!" Sunny exclaimed. "I'll be eighteen in two months. But, if

you want more grown daughters, why can't Peter get married and bring his wife home here to live?" she reasoned. "It's time he got married, anyway."

"Now that," said Peter, "is a bright and logical suggestion. I'll see at once what can be done about it. What sort of daughter do you prefer, mother—blond, brunet, tall, short, slim, or chunky?"

"And a lot of difference it would make what sort I preferred!" Sarah Holliday returned good-naturedly. "When you get ready to marry, son, you'll select your wife without reference to me or to anybody else. And that's just as it should be. I shall never be one of those mothers who think that their daughters should marry, but that their sons never should. Sunny's quite right: It's high time you married."

"Gosh," Peter moaned, "I don't believe I'm safe around here! Marriage is in the air. The first thing I know I'll be trying to figure out whether my ushers and best man should wear pink velours, edged with lace, or baby-blue chintz with chiffon side swipes. And I'll be simply worried to death for fear my best man is too fat to look well carrying a bouquet of forget-me-nots!"

IN the window seat Marjorie Shaw listened to this nonsense while she sewed snappers on an egg-shell silk blouse for Nancy. She made, Sarah Holliday thought, a most comforting picture of perfect domesticity. Why couldn't Peter look at her and really see her as she was—a girl of medium height, slim and sweet, with delightfully curly golden brown hair, parted in the middle and coiled over her ears? Marjorie had dark brown eyes, too, very beautiful, and just at present her wide, sweet mouth was smiling. But then Marjorie always smiled, or laughed delightedly, at Peter Holliday's jokes. And this not only because she wanted to please Peter. She thought he was the most amusing man on earth, as well as the most delightful and the most altogether wonderful one.

But there was no smile, now, in Marjorie's heart, and her thoughts were both disturbing and depressing. They ran something like this:

"Oh, dear, Peter could never joke that way about marriage, if he had thought seriously of it—if he had, for instance, ever thought seriously of *me!* And, if he hasn't thought by this time of marrying me, he never will, because we've known each other so long, ever since we were youngsters... And I've loved him all that time. But then I'll love him all my life, even if he never looks at me, even if, finally, he marries somebody else."

Peter married to some other girl! Oh, that was a thought which could not be endured! Fervently Marjorie wished that, since Peter did not love her, his family would stop suggesting that he should marry. Suppose—oh, just *suppose* they should talk him into marrying—somebody else! They could and they might, if they kept on.

Here, however, to her relief, Peter himself broke up the conversation.

"I just remembered, Nan," he remarked, "that I want to talk with you for a few minutes. And I imagine that now is as good a time as any. Since we're going over to the church to rehearse to-night, you won't have any time then, and certainly you won't have any time to-morrow to talk with a mere brother. So come on up to my study for a few minutes, will you?" Obviously curious, Nancy arose.

"What do you want to do?" she asked laughingly; "tell me how to treat Colin?"

"Never you mind," Peter returned. "Just come along with me."

So Nancy went. And Marjorie was left with Theo, Sunny, and Mrs. Holliday.

"I'm so glad you've arranged to spend the night here, dear," the latter said affectionately. "Nancy loves having you, and you're such a help to us. But aren't you straining your eyes in that light? Hadn't you better come over and light the lamp?"

"I've just finished," Marjorie said, holding up the blouse for inspection. "So I think I'll take this up and put it in Nan's trunk."

"It's beautiful," Sunny declared. "You certainly do sew well, Marge."

"I should say she does," Theo agreed. "But I do hope, Marge," she continued, "that you'll take that good long holiday you've promised yourself after this wedding's over, and I hope, too, that you'll be the next one to marry; so that Nan and I can help you as much as you've helped us."

"Ben Waverly's mad about her," Sunny announced, "but she can't seem to see him."

Marjorie flushed and remarked, "You're an awfully crazy youngster, Sunny. Ben Waverly isn't in the least mad about me."

"Oh, he *is!*" the younger girl exclaimed. "I heard him tell Colin the other night that he'd never be preparing for a wedding unless you changed your mind and agreed to marry him."

"Of course Ben loves you, Marge," Theo interposed. "He doesn't even try to make a secret of it. And he has a lot of money, too. He could marry almost any girl he wanted. But I'm not sure he's the man for you—I wouldn't do anything in a hurry. Go on and take that holiday that's coming to you, and then, when you come back, who knows what might happen? Anyway, I'd hate to see you marry Ben if you don't love him."

Marjorie smiled a little tremulously, rose, and crossed the room with Nan's blouse over her arm.

"I don't imagine," she remarked, "that I'll ever marry any one. I'll be a sort of professional aunt to all your children."

"Oh, no you won't, my dear," Mrs. Holliday predicted. "Not with those eyes."

"But what good do my eyes do me?" Marjorie asked herself ruefully as she went up the stairs. "I'll bet Peter doesn't even know the color of them."

FATE had, however, a world-rocking surprise in store for her.

As she reached the top of the stairs, Nancy came out of Peter's study, beckoned to her in a manner deeply mysterious, and then led the way into her own room. Marjorie followed, and the door was closed after her.

"I'm going to tell you something," Nancy announced: "but you must swear on your word of honor never to repeat it to *anybody*, not even Peter."

"Of course I won't," Marjorie said readily. "I promise."

"All right, then," Nancy continued, as they seated themselves on a rather worn *chaise longue*, "I'll tell you. I really think I should, because, if I were you I'd want to know; so it seems only fair for me to warn you."

"About what?" Marjorie asked apprehensively. "What is it, Nan?"

"Well, it's this: Peter wanted to

talk with me just now, you know, and you could never in this world guess what he wanted to talk *about*."

"No," breathlessly, "I couldn't. So—tell me!"

"He wanted to ask me if I thought you'd marry him."

Marjorie's brown eyes widened and darkened until it seemed to Nancy that they were completely black. Neither girl spoke for several seconds; then, in a half whisper, Marjorie asked:

"Are you—*sure?*"

"Absolutely," was the firm response. "Peter spoke to me about it because he thought I'd know if you were in love with anybody else. When I told him I was sure you weren't, he said he was going to ask you, to-night, to marry him."

"To—to-night!" Marjorie repeated incredulously. "Oh, Nan, I—I can't *believe* it!"

"Well, it's true," the other girl assured her. "And, oh, my dear, I'm so glad!" Impulsively she slipped her arms around her friend, and hugged hard.

Marjorie at that moment looked as though the most gracious of all the good fairies had just touched her with a magic wand. A slow-dawning, joyous smile was playing about her lips, and her eyes were like stars. So Eve must have looked when she realized the true meaning of Paradise—and so girls will continue to look as long as the world rolls on.

"Peter *loves* me!" she exulted. "But—but, Nan, I never, *never* suspected it."

"Oh, well, you know how he is," Nancy reminded her. "He always covers up his real feelings with a lot of nonsense. But even I didn't suspect him of being in love with you. Of course I've hoped he would be—"

"That's because you know I love him."

"No, not entirely. Even if you didn't care about Peter, now, I'd hope you would, because I want you for my sister."

"Do you suppose that the rest of your family know how I feel about him?" Marjorie questioned.

"Not for a minute," said Nancy promptly and most untruthfully. She continued, however, with perfect truth, "And certainly Peter himself doesn't suspect it. He thought possibly you liked Ben Waverly, and of course everybody knows Ben is crazy about you. Then when I told him I *knew* you didn't care for Ben, Peter said he thought he'd try his luck."

"Ben doesn't count," Marjorie said dreamily. "Nobody ever has or ever will count but Peter."

Nancy hugged her again.

"I know. That's just the way I feel about Colin. I thought once that I liked Keith Pennington, you know, but, oh, I didn't, not *really*. It's always been Colin, and it always will be. And I'm going to marry him tomorrow! Oh, I'm the happiest girl on earth!"

"Indeed you're not," Marjorie assured her. "*I* am."

And perhaps Marjorie was nearer right. For, after all, who could be happier than a girl who had loved a man hopelessly for years, and had just learned that he not only loved her, but intended to ask her to marry him?

At any rate, Marjorie had never supposed that any girl could be so completely, so gloriously happy as she was. All during dinner, and afterward during the rehearsal for the wedding, the glad little smile came frequently to her lips. Her eyes continued to look like great stars and her heart sang.

Peter Holliday loved her! Oh, it was unbelievable, miraculous, yet it was true! How would he tell her of his love? Would he be eager and ardent, or just tender and sweet? However he went about it, he would show, for her eyes alone, a man totally different from the old laughing, whimsical, blundering Peter, who hadn't a grain of tact. He was a man in love, now, ready to tell his girl about it—and he was *her* man! Oh, she would love him with all her heart, always, and she would spend her whole life trying to make him a good wife.

Once during the evening Marjorie closed her eyes and tried to imagine Peter's kiss upon her lips. Often she had done this before, but now it was different, for now she was trying to imagine a kiss she would soon receive. And, even in imagination, it was like heaven.

ALL things considered, it was a wonderful evening for everybody. No one there ever forgot the rehearsal for Nancy's wedding. The bride herself was so radiantly happy, and Colin was so obviously, so magnificently in love. John and Theo, too, who were newly married, were delightfully in love with each other, and it was easy to see that these preparations for Nancy's wedding were taking them back to their own. Sunny was all over the place, a blithe, glad spirit, rightly named. As for Peter—well, Peter was just himself, red-haired and engaging, and he appeared to be having a wonderful time.

The rehearsal had taken place in the church. When it was over they all drove back to the Hollidays', where a hot supper awaited them.

And now it seemed to Marjorie that she was standing on the outskirts of Paradise, just waiting for the gates to open and admit her. For surely, if Peter was going to propose to her tonight, he would do it very soon. But when, where, and how would he do it?

All three of these questions were almost immediately answered. As soon as they reached the house he asked her if she would come up to his study for a few minutes, explaining that he wanted to talk with her alone.

"I seem," he concluded, "to be specializing in dragging girls off to my study. First it was Nan, and now it's you. But I won't keep you long. Do you mind coming up for a few minutes?"

"Oh, no, not at all," Marjorie managed to respond, despite the wild hammering of her heart.

Now! It was going to happen *now!* And it did.

Peter led her up to his study, opened the door for her, turned on the light, and closed the door behind them. Then, for a terrifying space of time neither spoke. Marjorie seated herself in an old armchair and the young man stood before her, apparently struck dumb.

When at last the silence had become unendurable, he achieved the following opening:

"I—er—I wanted to talk with you."

Marjorie's cheeks were brightly flushed, her hands were cold, and her heart was still beating a rapid tattoo against her ribs. Nevertheless she was conscious of vast surprise. Peter was embarrassed! He actually *was*. And that was easily the last thing she had expected!

"Now—now that I've got you here, I—haven't the faintest idea how to say what I—want to say," he finally admitted.

"Oh, dear, if only I could help

him!" she thought. "But isn't he going to—make love to me first? Is he just going to stand there in that queer way, ask me to marry him, and then do all his love-making afterward? I didn't think there was a man left on earth who would go about it like that."

Still, what difference did it make? If only this new and amazingly embarrassed Peter could manage to say the words!

She *should* be able to help him. Some girls would do it beautifully. And even she, Marjorie concluded, would have to say *something*.

"Why can't you tell me—whatever it is?" she asked, with shy desperation.

And then Peter told her.

"It's that I've been thinking we might—might get married," he elucidated. "The girls are quite right, you know. It's high time I married—and—well, I know you better than I know any other girl. We could live right on here with mother. You wouldn't mind that, would you? She's awfully fond of you, and it occurred to me that, since she's feeling bad about the girls marrying and going away from home, she'd be delighted if I gave her a daughter who would stay right here."

Peter gathered her, old coat and all, into his arms and held her close

"But"—Marjorie was scrutinizing his face now, her own oddly strained—"but why do you want to marry—me?"

Peter looked surprised, but it was evident that he was now much more at ease.

"Why, I just told you," he pointed out, with, in the circumstances, becoming patience. "I said I knew you better than any other girl, and I might add that you're the most sensible girl I know."

"Is—is that *all?*" the girl half whispered, while all the color drained from her cheeks.

"All?" he queried, puzzled. Then a light broke upon him. "Oh, I see: You're afraid I'll pull some of that wild love stuff. Well, don't you worry, Marge, I won't. I'm not that kind of a lunatic. I wouldn't go in for that sort of twaddle any more than a sensible girl like you would. Gosh, it certainly is the bunk, isn't it? Let the others rave around, if they want to, but we won't."

"Oh!" said Marjorie in a strange, still little voice. Then again, "*Oh!* So you—don't love me?"

Peter began to look embarrassed again.

"Well, as to that, I imagine we'll love each other in a sane, reasonable way, if you decide to marry me. But," anxiously, "we wouldn't need to go in for any frills, would we? I'd never be any good at that sort of thing, you know."

Marjorie sat very still, her brown eyes wide, drowned in pain, her face colorless. She was trying to pick up the pieces of a broken dream, and to fit them together into something which might make endurable the rest of her life.

But, after all, she was only twenty-one, and she loved Peter Holliday with all her stricken, quivering young heart. And, in proportion to her love, her fury mounted.

This, then, was the proposal for which she had waited so happily, so confidently! *This!* Why, Peter Holliday might have been a man of eighty asking a woman of seventy-six to jog along comfortably with him for the few remaining years of their lives! And Peter was only twenty-five—or was it twenty-six? Anyway, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered, now.

"WELL, Marge, what do you say?" Peter asked at last. "Don't you think we could sort of get along together all right?"

"No," said Marjorie in a low, distinct voice. "I couldn't get along with a man like you, Peter, and fortunately there is no reason why I should try. I'm not exactly hideous, you know, and I certainly have a right to expect more from life than—than anything you have offered me."

"What do you mean?" he wanted to know.

"I mean," Marjorie explained, still with deadly calm, "that, although you don't seem to know it, you have a—a tremendous nerve."

Peter looked utterly astonished.

"You mean — because I asked you to marry me?" He groped for understanding. Then, "Oh, yes, I see! You think I haven't enough to offer a girl like you. Well," soberly, "you're right, of course. I don't make a lot of money and—"

Marjorie sprang to her feet.

"You not only have a nerve," she informed him, making a valiant effort to choke back her tears, "but you—you're an *idiot*. And don't you dare stand there and imply that I don't

think a man has any right to ask me to marry him unless he has plenty of money! Money hasn't *anything* to do with it, but the *man has*. The least any man can do, Peter, is to offer a girl all he has to give—but maybe you did do that. Maybe you're just as humdrum and—and awful as you sound. In any event, thank you very much, but I don't want you! If I ever marry at all I shall probably marry—Ben Waverly. He, at least, doesn't act as though he thinks I am worth no more than—than you offered me; so I'd much rather marry him. He has *some* sense."

"But," Peter faltered, "I—I don't understand."

"No, and you never will. Didn't I tell you you hadn't any sense? So there's no use discussing it."

"I suppose there isn't, since you're going to marry Ben Waverly," Peter agreed, his brow furrowed. "But, my word, Marge, I never knew you to fly off like this before! You were always—sort of quiet. And if it isn't my lack of money which you object to, I still can't see how I made you so mad. You've called me a lot of names—"

"And I could call you a lot more!" she retorted. "You're positively dumb, Peter Holliday, and I wish I never needed to see you again! Good night!"

With that she dashed out of the room, down the hall, and into the room she was sharing with Nancy.

There in the dark she gripped her hands together and fought back the tears. Oh, she mustn't cry! This was the night before Nancy's wedding, and downstairs they were preparing a supper for the bridal party.

Marjorie pressed her hands hard against her eyes, as though to force back the tears. Oh, she must go down to that supper! She was going to be one of the bridesmaids. And she couldn't let them see her to-night with red eyes. Nancy was so happy. They were all so happy. And she—Marjorie stifled a sob—she had thought she would be the happiest one of them all! She had supposed she would be engaged to Peter, loved by Peter—

A few minutes later, having bathed her face and powdered her nose, Marjorie went down to supper. And somehow she managed to laugh and talk, although afterward she could not have told one word she had said.

Peter was there, too, a strangely quiet Peter, toward whom Marjorie did not even glance.

As soon as she could she managed to slip away, go up to Nancy's room, undress, and get into bed. And when Nancy came up some time later Marjorie pretended to be asleep.

So, for that night at least, she avoided being questioned.

It was hard to keep on pretending, though, when Nancy got into bed, drew a long, happy sigh, and snuggled under the covers. Marjorie lay motionless beside her, staring into the darkness, desperately afraid that the tears which were now streaming unchecked down her face, might end in a sob which would tell her chum the whole story.

And, oh, Nan must not be made unhappy to-night! She must not even come in contact with unhappiness, for to-morrow was her wedding day. To-morrow she was to be a bride.

What a world of difference there was between those two girls, cradled there in Sarah Holliday's old walnut bed! One was a happy little bride-to-be, who held in her sleep-relaxed hands all of joy that the world had to offer;

the other was a girl whose high hopes had just been shattered beyond repair, a girl who was crying herself noiselessly to sleep.

THE next morning Marjorie could not avoid Nancy's eager questions, but she managed to throw dust in her friend's happy blue eyes.

"Peter didn't have a chance last night to ask me to marry him," she said evasively.

"But," Nan remembered, "he took you up to his den—"

"Well, yes, he did, but people kept interrupting us. Don't you worry, though. He'll find plenty of time to propose to me after your wedding is over."

And with this Nancy had to be satisfied. It was not difficult, though, to satisfy her that morning.

The early part of the day passed all too quickly for everybody but Marjorie. But it was possible, in the general confusion, for her to avoid Peter. Otherwise she felt that she could not have remained in the Holliday house, even for Nancy's wedding.

And then at last the hour for the wedding arrived. The house was fragrant with flowers; the bride, in her gown of white satin and filmy veil, was ready to start for the church. Marjorie and Sunny, the two bridesmaids, were wearing quaint frocks of blue-flowered taffeta with tight bodices, tiny puffed sleeves, and long, full skirts. Their arms were laden with Killarney roses.

"I hope," Sunny whispered excitedly, "that I look even one half as nice as you do, Marge."

"You look perfectly lovely," Marjorie assured her. "In fact, I've just begun to realize that you'll probably turn out to be the beauty of the family."

"Oh, no, I couldn't!" Sunny protested. "Just *look* at Nan! Isn't she gorgeous?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, "she is—bless her heart!"

It was only a short drive to the church. There, Marjorie and Sunny stood in the vestibule, waiting for Nancy, listening to the music.

How beautiful it was, and how solemn!

Marjorie shivered a little. She felt suddenly cold and desperately afraid that she could not keep back the betraying tears which were, to-day, so near the surface. Oh, what was she doing here, a bridesmaid at a wedding! How could she go through with it after what happened last night between her and Peter?

Peter had asked her to marry him, without any frills. But he had not meant frills of this sort; he had not been referring to a large church wedding. He had meant that he wanted her to marry him without any love.

"Oh," Sunny breathed in her ear, "*listen!* Isn't it lovely? I'm going to have that sung at my wedding, aren't you, Marge?"

And Marjorie, with quivering lips and with tears filming the pain in her great dark eyes, was forced to stand there, inhaling the fragrance of Nancy's bridal roses, while she listened to the clear, sweet voices of the choir boys:

"O, Perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before Thy throne;
That theirs may be the love that knows no ending,
Whom Thou forever more dost join in one.

"O, Perfect Life, be Thou their full assurance,
Of tender charity and steadfast faith,
Of patient hope and quiet, brave endurance,
With childlike trust that fears nor pain nor death.

"Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow;
Grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife;
And to life's day the glorious unknown morrow,
That dawns upon eternal love and life."

There was a stir in the vestibule. The choir boys had stopped singing and the magic strains of the wedding march were swelling through the church. It was time for the bridesmaids to start down the aisle.

"Marge, what's the matter?" Sunny asked. "You look ill."

"I'm all right," Marjorie briefly assured her. "Come on."

Together they walked down the aisle in their flowered taffeta frocks, their arms filled with roses, and stood at the sides of the altar, while Nancy was married to Colin.

Marjorie forced a smile to her lips and held her brown head high.

Peter, there beside Colin . . . He might look this way, and if he did, he must see her smiling, not caring.

But, oh, how *could* she smile with the words of that wedding hymn still ringing in her ears:

"That theirs may be the love that knows no ending,
Whom Thou forever more dost join in one."

"The love that knows no ending!" Love like hers for Peter—but never, never would she kneel here with him before this altar . . .

At last the wedding was over, and the bridesmaids, with the rest of the wedding party, drove back to the house. Marjorie had to stand in line with the bride, then, and receive the guests.

"You look wonderful, Marge," Ben Waverly said in a low voice, as he paused before her. "Spare me a few minutes after this show is over, won't you?"

"Of course," said Marjorie lightly. Then, as she saw that Peter was talking with an elderly cousin directly behind Ben, she added distinctly, "And I'm awfully glad you think I look nice, Ben."

"I think you look gorgeous," he corrected her. "Just where can I see you alone, when you're free?"

She hesitated only a minute; then, seemingly unaware that Peter was anywhere in the vicinity, she spoke even more distinctly than before:

"I'll meet you in—say twenty minutes, up in Peter's study. You know where that is, don't you?"

"Rather! I know this good old house pretty well. I'll be there, Marge. And those twenty minutes will seem like twenty years."

Fervently Marjorie hoped that Peter had heard every word Ben said.

When at last she was free, she went dutifully, though most unwillingly, up to Peter's study. She did not want to be alone with Ben, but she had ostentatiously promised to meet him, and now there was nothing to do but keep her word.

She would, she determined, explain to Ben that she had a headache and really couldn't stay and talk with anybody.

When she reached the study, however, Ben was not there. Glancing at her wrist watch, Marjorie saw that it lacked twelve minutes to the time she

had appointed to meet him; but she was glad she had come up here, where, for a little while at least, she could be alone.

She crossed to the window and stood there, looking out. A light snow had fallen. The Hollidays' back yard was white and glistening.

Where, Marjorie wondered, should she go on her vacation, which started next week? She had planned, since she was taking it this year in the winter, to visit cousins in Boston. But they were light-hearted, happy people, those cousins of hers. She didn't want to go to them now. She wanted to be alone—anywhere alone.

Just then her hand, which was resting on the window frame, touched something rough and soft. She glanced indifferently toward it—and recognized Peter's old smoking jacket.

Surely never before had a worn smoking jacket, hanging limp and inoffensive on its hook, been at once mourned over and welcomed with such unrestrained fervor. Marjorie clutched it with tense, yearning fingers, buried her face in it, and burst into heart-broken tears.

She cried for perhaps a minute, stifling her sobs in the old coat that was scented with Peter's own particular brand of tobacco, and then footsteps sounded behind her, eager, impetuous footsteps.

Ben! Marjorie remembered. He had come, and found her crying into Peter's coat! He might tell people—

"Marge!" a strained, masculine voice exclaimed. "My dear!"

Marjorie looked up, then, very quickly—and saw, not Ben Waverly, but Peter Holliday.

Trapped, desperate, the girl stared at him through her tears.

"Marge!" he said again. "You were crying over my old coat! Does that mean—"

"It—it doesn't mean *anything,*" she gasped. "Go away!"

"I shan't," Peter declared. "I've got to know—I've got to make you understand. You see, I didn't know anything—not enough to come in out of the rain—but now I do. I know—oh, darling, I love you!"

And with that he caught her close in his arms, pressing his cheek hard against hers. At last he turned his head, and their lips met.

It was a long, clinging kiss, and it made Marjorie feel that, even though the tears had not yet dried in her eyes, they had dried forever in her heart.

"What made you know that you—love me?" she whispered.

"That song, or hymn, or whatever it was that the choir sang just before you came down the church aisle today," Peter said promptly. "It was—sort of wonderful, you know, and it made me understand, somehow, the way I really feel about you."

"You mean, 'O, Perfect Love,'" Marjorie whispered. "Yes, it is wonderful, Peter. It *would* make you realize that you loved me, if anything could."

"If anything could, is right," he ruefully admitted. "You didn't exaggerate, darling: I was dumb — just plain *dumb.* Why, I was perfectly willing to leave out of my life the most wonderful thing that could come into it! What if I hadn't waked up! Oh, Marge, do you love me—*do* you?"

"Of course I do. Why else would I have been so furious with you last night?"

"Oh," said Peter, with a truly brilliant burst of understanding, "was that why you were so mad at me—because you thought I wasn't offering you as much as you could give me?"

"Yes, naturally it was. And, anyway, what girl would want to be proposed to like that?"

"It was awful, wasn't it?" he humbly admitted. "But—but I think I could do better now, darling."

"All right," said Marjorie. "Go ahead and try."

"WELL, I love you. In fact, I adore you. You're the most beautiful girl on earth, and, if you don't marry me — but you've just got to!"

"I will," Marjorie promised radiantly. "And that was much better, dear—oh, ever so mu—"

The rest was smothered against Peter's eager, devouring lips.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed delightedly a few minutes later. "Isn't it wonderful, this being in love? Just suppose we had missed it!"

At that moment some one tried the doorknob, and finally rapped on the door.

"It's Ben!" Marjorie whispered. "I'd forgotten all about him."

"Who is it?" Peter called.

"It's I—Ben Waverly," came back through the closed door. "I had a date up here in your study, old man."

"Sorry," Peter returned, "but you'll have to keep it somewhere else. This room's in use."

"I heard you agreeing to meet him up here," Peter acknowledged, as Ben's footsteps died away; "so I locked the door when I came in—"

There was the sound of voices, now, in the hallway. Again some one tapped on the door.

"Who is it, now?" Peter inquired somewhat belligerently.

"It's Sunny," he was promptly informed. "Let me in!"

"You must," Nancy told her very new fiancé. "Besides, we've got to go downstairs."

"I'll let her in for a minute," Peter decided; "but we won't go downstairs for another ten minutes."

He kissed the upturned face so near his own; then crossed the room and opened the door.

Sunny and Theo entered.

"What are you doing up here?" the former inquired. "Mother told me to find you both and tell you supper is nearly ready—"

"Well," said Peter, believing that he looked nonchalant, but succeeding merely in looking boyishly important, "you see, we've been getting engaged—"

But before he could say any more, both Sunny and Theo fairly pounced upon Marjorie, and their exclamations and kisses promised her a royal welcome into the Holliday clan.

"This is what I've always hoped for!" Theo exclaimed. "And we'll help you get your things ready, Marge. You've done so much for Nan that you're all tired out. But then your vacation starts next week, doesn't it? Or"—she looked inquiringly from Marjorie to her brother—"won't you go away, now that you're engaged to Peter? Of course, after this hectic wedding and before you start to prepare for your own, you really do need a good long holiday."

"But hasn't she got one?" Peter asked with his old, confident grin. "Hasn't she just agreed to take, for life, a good, long Holliday?"

Sunny laughed and made a face at him.

"You're a long Holliday, all right," she agreed, "but you're not so good as you think you are, because nobody could be. So—"

"Oh," said Marjorie, softly indig-

nant, "he is, too! He's a good, long, *perfect* Holliday. I wouldn't think of going away and leaving him."

Sunny groaned, Theo laughed, and Peter looked sheepish but vastly delighted.

"You are," Sunny observed, "what I call in love! So let *us* go away and leave *them*, Theo. I'm dying to tell mother and Nan, anyway. They'll be just as glad as we are. But," she added from the doorway, "see to it that you two are downstairs in five minutes."

The door closed behind them; Marjorie and Peter were alone again.

"We must go down," the girl said, as the man's arms closed around her. "But tell me just one thing before we go: What made you sure that that wedding hymn had opened your eyes to your love for me? I mean—how did you *feel?*"

Peter kissed her as though that might help him to remember—and apparently it did.

"I felt," he explained, "that I wanted to guard you and cherish you and love and be loved by you. I felt, suddenly, that marriage without perfect love would be a horrible mockery, and I felt that I wanted to take you in my arms, like this, and kiss you, like this—forever."

"Blessed old wedding hymn!" Marjorie whispered unsteadily. "It did a glorious day's work. And yet it hurt me so when the choir boys sang it. It stood for everything beautiful in life which I believed I could never have. And it was like—well, I presume it was like a mirage to a man dying of thirst. Yet, all the time, although I didn't know it, it was giving me—you."

"But, gosh, I'm not much, you know, Marge!" Peter humbly protested, tightening his arms about her. "I don't see how any girl as wonderful as you are ever happened to love me. But I—I certainly do love you. I—oh, I don't know how to tell you about it!"

"You're doing pretty well, dear," she exulted, smiling into his earnest eyes. "After last night I never would have suspected you could do one half so well."

With mock ferocity Peter shook her a little; then he kissed her a great deal.

"I'll get better all the time," he boasted. "Just see if I don't. The first thing you know I'll be spouting poetry to you—about your eyes. They—they're such wonderful eyes, darling, I never saw anything like them."

"Tell me about them after supper," Marjorie greedily invited. "We must go downstairs now. This is Nan's wedding, you know. And I'm the very last person who should delay that wedding supper—because, even though Nan *was* married to-day, *I'm* the happiest girl in the world!"

You Gave Me Love

By ANNA BLAKE MEZQUIDA

YOU gave me love . . . My dear, you gave me eyes!
The gift to walk a lonely path and see
Not hard gnarled roots in earth but leafy spire;
The vision that could thread my hot desire
To mark the sham and the reality;
You showed me the immortal glad surprise
Of Spring. You gave me eyes.

You gave me love . . . Ah, dear, you gave me wings!
You loosed a something in me that could soar,
And broke old fetters which had held before;
You put upon my lips a song, a cry,
A small hushed wonder lifting me on high,
Such heaven-drenched beauty as the wild lark flings
At dawn. You gave me wings.

You gave me love . . . . Dear heart, you gave me God!
You tossed into my empty arms the stars
To be the altar candles of my night;
You wrapped your faith about me, still and white,
And hung a lamp of truth within my bars;
You stooped and raised my bruised head from the sod;
My dear . . . you gave me God.

"Don't touch my wife!" cried Pierce, and struck him

A Man Without Mercy

By MRS. HARRY PUGH SMITH

"IT is the end. He'll not last out the night," said the physician.

The big, fair man crouched in a chair by the bedside lifted his haggard face.

"There's nothing you can do?" he asked hoarsely.

Dr. Bain shook his head.

"I'm sorry."

Pierce Layton's brown hands clenched; his broad shoulders twisted.

"Oh, Gene, Gene! Little Buddy!" he cried in agony.

And as if his name had recalled him for a moment from the shadows into which he was sinking, the thin, wasted boy on the bed stirred and opened his eyes—fevered eyes, however, that held no hint of recognition for the brother who bent over him.

"Sylvia! Sylvia!" he murmured, as he had a thousand times before in his delirium. "You broke my heart!"

That pitiful wail struck each time with greater bitterness at Pierce Layton's heart.

"Damn her! Damn her!" he cried through set teeth.

"Why did you lead me on, Sylvia, and then jilt me when you learned I wasn't rich? Why did you make me love you when the only thing you love is money? Oh, beautiful, cruel, heartless Sylvia!"

Pierce Layton stood up.

"I can't stand it!" he said fiercely. "God, if only she were here to view her handiwork; if I could hold her here and make her watch his heart breaking! Murderess!"

Blair Beverley went down before the impact, groaning and cursing

"Steady, Pierce, steady!" cautioned Dr. Bain.

He had known Pierce Layton intimately for ten years. Down in this remote section of Louisiana men of their type were scarce. Pierce's huge sugar cane plantation was worked entirely by Negroes, and most of the other inhabitants were poor whites, Cajuns who lived a furtive life in the swamps and bayous that fed the gulf.

Of the few plantation owners Dr. Bain had found Pierce by far the most to his own liking. Yet, tried and true as was their friendship, the old physician hesitated before he spoke because he knew the blind devotion the other man held for his half-brother, Gene Falk, dying there beside them.

"You mustn't blame the woman entirely," he said gravely. "Be fair, Pierce. Gene was always weak. You sent him to New York to get him away from things here. Had he never met this—er—Sylvia, there's every chance he would have gone exactly as he has."

Pierce Layton winced. It was true. His brother, younger than he by ten years, had always been lazy, with a bent for dissipation.

The money all belonged to Pierce, but he had never stinted Gene; he had, rather, indulged him too much.

While in New York Gene had evidently lived up to the rôle of a rich man royally. He had become engaged to a beautiful society woman with an ambitious mother, both of them out to bag rich husbands. Unfortunately they had learned the truth about Gene and sent him packing, and the boy, bitterly disillusioned, came home to drink himself to death.

But although he had been in a fair way of doing the same thing even under his brother's watchful care, Pierce Layton loved the boy, and all he could think of was that a woman had ruined him. His brother whom he would have given his life to save!

"Maybe he *was* weak," he said aloud, his face like granite. "But he had good in him, I—I could have made a man of him."

The old doctor sighed. He did not believe anything or anybody could have made a man of Gene. But there was no use saying so now. Let Pierce get what comfort he could out of blaming some one else for the inevitable. Probably Sylvia was as black as she was painted, anyway.

"Sylvia, when I went down on my knees to you, when I begged you not to let me go, when I told you I'd—I'd kill myself," raved on the dying boy, "how could you have been so cruel?"

AGAIN Pierce Layton's powerful hands clenched. He bent over his brother, tried desperately to get through to him.

"She's going to pay, Gene," he cried. "She's going to have a heartache for every one she's caused you, going down on her knees for mercy and be denied just as she denied you!"

But the boy did not hear. With a stricken cry Pierce Layton caught up one of the thin, white hands. It was wax in his grip. Gene was dead; his bloodless lips had stilled forever. He would never again call heartbrokenly for the woman who had played him for a fool.

"Dead! He's dead!"

White-faced, shaking, the stricken man stumbled from the room. The night outside was eerily white with the August moon, except that toward the bayou, as always, a phantom mist hung over the dank, cypress-lined swamp. On the edge of the morass Pierce Layton stood, staring at the sullen water. It was difficult to see where the swamp ended and the bayou began, and there were quicksands, too; it was a dangerous place.

For a moment in his anguish, Pierce Layton had a wild impulse to walk on out into that green, treacherous waste where at least oblivion awaited, where he could forget that the little buddy he had sworn to protect always had left him, thanks to a woman. He had even advanced a step blindly when a hand closed on his wrist, a slim hand, but very strong, and pulled him back.

"No, no!" cried a rich, husky voice.

He whirled sharply.

It was the Cajun girl, Zasa. Pierce had never liked her; indeed, once he had feared her because she had seemed in a fair way of trapping Gene. But even Pierce admitted her strange, barbaric beauty. Spanish, French, and Indian bloods were mixed curiously in her to produce a fantastically lovely creature, voluptuous yet lithe. Her great black eyes were often inscrutable but at times quite mad with wild emotions; her dangerously alluring face was like a creamy magnolia petal, her sulky mouth like a scarlet flower.

Such was Zasa, child of the swamps, an orphan living, God knows how, among her kind, a creature who boasted she could get any man she desired, and she could—save only one.

"Let me be!" cried Pierce Layton fiercely. "Whose business is it what I do? Who'd care?"

Her black eyes flamed under the heavy cloud of her hair; she drew nearer, her scarlet lips a snare.

"Zasa would care," she said, in that havoc-working voice of hers.

Pierce Layton laughed contemptuously. He was not interested in her wiles.

"You'd be wasting your time, Zasa," he said bitterly. "I hate women, all women! And yet I'm glad a woman caught me back to-night because"—he laughed harshly—"I mean to live to avenge myself—*on a woman.*"

"Yes?" said the girl softly. "But no woman will ever love you as I do. Every other man in the world wants me, but I want only you. Love me, love me, love me!"

She tried to fling herself into his arms. It was true. While other men wanted her, Pierce Layton's indifference had made her his slave. But he brushed her roughly away.

"I have no time for love," he said. "My business from now on is concerned with hate."

And he turned back toward the house and the thing he meant to do.

CHAPTER I

"I LOVE HIM!"

THE room was crowded with expensively dressed women, and blue with cigarette smoke curling up from tense jeweled fingers. Sylvia Plant played her last card.

"Game and rubber," she said wearily.

She was so tired of it all, of these women who played for too high stakes, of the envy and malice back of the feverish smiles on their painted mouths, of the lack of sincerity and kindliness among these who called themselves friends.

Friends! Her lips curled. Not one of them but hated her because, penniless though she was, she had an asset they would have given their lives for—a great and glamorous beauty. Much good it had ever done her, she thought bitterly, the pink and white and gold of her perfect coloring, the slim, proud lines of her graceful figure.

"And Sylvia's the heavy winner as usual," murmured Kitty Bright maliciously. "Really, my dear, it's too bad your mother doesn't have *your* skill at cards."

Sylvia's violet eyes narrowed at the hidden slur. Her mother was as poor a gambler as she was an inveterate one. She couldn't afford to play bridge for money, but she constantly did so, in spite of the girl's protests. Months ago they had been forced to sell the last of their jewels to pay Mrs. Plant's losses.

"Yes, it *is* too bad mother's unlucky," said Sylvia now. "That's why she's stopped playing."

"Oh, has she?" purred Kitty. "Since when? I played with her last night—by the way, remind her, please, she hasn't mailed me my check. It was only five hundred, but"—she laughed—"I *love* to collect my winnings."

Sylvia's clear cheeks drained of color, but she answered quietly: "I'll tell her." No use letting them see her feelings!

"Here's what's coming to you, Syl-

via," said Peg Moore. "Lucky Sylvia!"

"Oh, well, lucky at cards, unlucky at love," murmured Alice West spitefully.

Sylvia winced. She knew that these envious women were glad that so far she had failed of the purpose for which she had been reared—the snaring of a rich husband.

"I *do* seem rather slow *getting my man*," she acknowledged with a forced smile.

"But who was that stunning-looking man at the opera last night?" asked Kitty. "He looked like a Greek god in evening dress—really, a thrilling person."

Sylvia hated the warm color which she felt dyeing her cheeks. The man she had met the night before had, indeed, had something "thrilling" about him, a quality which had fascinated her from the minute he took her hand and gazed deep down into her glowing eyes.

He had sat down beside her for a time. They had said little, but she had been acutely conscious of his broad shoulder so near her own, of his strong aquiline features and fine, stern mouth. She had felt a throb of pure joy when he had asked to see her again, though she had an uneasy moment when he mentioned that he had already met her mother. She wondered where, but had been afraid to ask.

"His name is Layton, I understand," she answered composedly, and then, because she did not want to be questioned further, she rose and managed to get away.

She was anxious, too, to see her mother. She had to know if there were other gambling debts to pay. To scrape up five hundred for Kitty would strain their resources to the limit, and if there were more—Sylvia went cold with fear.

THEIR apartment had nothing to recommend it but its fashionable address. It was small and crowded and hopelessly dreary except for the one big living room where it was necessary for them occasionally to entertain.

And Sylvia hated it as she did all the rest of the feverish game of keeping up appearances.

Every penny they could spare went to decking her to attract her prey; every possible string was pulled to get her invited to places where an eligible man might turn up. Mrs. Plant fawned on people she despised to get Sylvia bids to parties which only bored the girl. She and her mother scrimped even on food and other necessities to make a splurge.

Sylvia would a thousand times have rather gone to work. But her mother had, conveniently, a weak heart. Whenever the girl even looked as if she might rebel, Mrs. Plant had a sinking spell.

"Oh, is that you, dear?" she called now from the small, dark bedroom as her daughter entered. "Come here! I've such news for you!"

She was a frail woman with a faded, petulant beauty and a drooping yet willful mouth. Just now her big, pale blue eyes were glowing with feverish excitement.

"Mother, have you been gambling again?" Sylvia began.

"Why, no, I—well, yes, what of it?" she cried, with a lame attempt at defiance.

"How much do you owe?"

Mrs. Plant was trapped. She had no idea what Sylvia had found out.

"I didn't mean to get in so deep,

but I—well, Bertha Farris *would* go down to that new gambling place, the Red Wheel, and I—I had rotten luck—and—"

The girl felt a little sick. It was worse, far worse, than she had feared. She had heard of the luxurious new gambling club, but had not dreamed her mother would dare frequent a place where the stakes were so high.

"How much?" she demanded again.

Her mother was trembling.

"I—well, I never dreamed I was getting in so deep," she whimpered. "But—"

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars!" the other confessed in a whisper.

The blood roared in Sylvia's ears.

"Don't look like that, Sylvia," the woman cried. "It's going to be all right! I told you I had good news! It's all straightened out. You see, I—I lost to a man, and he's being wonderful about it. He—oh, Sylvia, we're too lucky! He has my I. O. U., but he's going to tear it up and—all for you!"

"All for me!" blankly.

"Yes, he—he met you last night, and he—I always knew we'd get a break sometime—he fell madly in love with you! He was here this afternoon—he's just left—but he's coming back to take us to dinner. He wants to marry you and give me an allowance as long as I live. And he's rolling in wealth, and he's wild about you and—and everything's going to be all right!"

Sylvia had begun to tremble.

"*Who is this man?*"

"His name is Pierce Layton, and he has a sugar plantation in Louisiana, and he's simply rolling in wealth!" her mother giggled feebly. "I'm not taking any chances this time—I've had him looked up. He's as rich as he claims, and"—she made a grimace—"he hasn't any wife, either, to spring up and spoil things."

Sylvia shivered.

"How can you laugh about that poor fellow?"

Her mother tossed her head.

"Poor fellow, nothing! I've no sympathy for Gene Falk! He palmed himself off under false pretenses. He got just what he deserved."

Sylvia sighed.

"But he loved me, and he suffered."

"And you'd actually have gone on and married him out of pity, when *you* knew he hadn't a dime!"

"I was rather fond of him, and he needed me," said the girl simply.

"He needed a good thrashing!" was the vindictive answer. Then her hectic eyes lit again. "But don't waste time talking of him. Mr. Layton will be back in an hour and you must look your prettiest."

"But, mother, he scarcely knows me," she faltered. Still, she thought, she scarcely knew him and yet—

"It was a case of love at first sight," explained her mother gloatingly.

Yet, Sylvia thought, Mr. Layton had not looked like a man any woman could sweep off his feet at a glance. He was so strong, so virile, and when his gray eyes had pierced hers there had been something almost sardonic in their expression. She had not dreamed he even admired her.

"You are sure he—he cares?" she asked in a voice that trembled in spite of herself. The idea set her heart to pounding.

"Of course."

"But I—I've barely met him—"

"Sylvia, are you going to turn difficult now? Don't you realize this marriage is the one thing that can save us from ruin? It's like a miracle!"

"I realize I'm being sold to a stranger to pay your gambling debts."

"Oh, how can you put it like that? Oh, my heart—you are bringing on one of my sinking spells."

"It won't be necessary," said Sylvia sarcastically. "You may spare yourself an attack, mother. If Mr. Layton asks me to marry him to-night, I'll consent."

"Oh, darling, you make me so happy! You've solved all our problems! We'll never have to worry about money again!"

"But that isn't why I'm marrying him," the girl told herself when she was alone. "I'm marrying him because — because" — her cheeks went hot—"he's the only man I ever saw I'd follow to the ends of the earth and back. Because I—love him!"

CHAPTER II

"BOUGHT!"

AFTERWARD, that evening when Pierce Layton asked her to be his wife always seemed a confused dream to Sylvia. She was dressed when he came, a lovely, glamorous girl in a scarlet evening gown, her golden hair swirled about her beautiful head, her violet eyes luminous in the delicate oval of her face, her cheeks brightly flushed. But she was shy about entering the room where she heard her mother chattering volubly, shy to face this man, yet eager for another glimpse of him.

And when she did come in and he rose to meet her, his hand held out, she felt a strange intoxication of all her senses. It was true! People do love at first sight; she loved him and he loved her, too, for he was here now to ask her to marry him. But when her eyes met his, again she saw that strange expression which had puzzled her before. Surely it was not love she read there?

And yet his voice was flattering in the extreme. "I told you I had to see you again," he murmured, and pressed her slender hand.

The blood raced through her at his touch. How handsome he was, how big and strong! She hardly knew where they dined nor what they said; she knew only that she was radiantly happy. And when they were home again and her mother archly left them alone, she found herself trembling at the thought that he was going to tell her he loved her, that he would take her in his arms. But the proposal, when it came, was not as she had dreamed.

"Your mother has told you I want to marry you?" he asked abruptly.

She nodded.

"And you agree?"

She hesitated, and again she saw that sardonic flicker in his eyes.

"Of course you understand I'm taking over all your debts and making her an allowance. But I'll expect you to live where I do, even if it is rather an out-of-the-way place for a young lady who's been used to gay society."

Still not one word of love!

"I shan't mind," she said softly. If he only knew how bored she was with her butterfly existence!

"But of course you'll have everything that money can buy."

She flushed. He was making it very plain that she had been for sale, and that he was prepared to pay the market price. He believed she was marrying him solely for his money; she would try to explain.

"You think I'm marrying you because you are a rich man," she began.

"I know you wouldn't marry me if I were poor," he answered.

She drew back, white to the lips.

"You're wrong. I—I—"

But at that minute her mother appeared in the doorway.

"Is everything settled?" she asked anxiously, her hand hovering toward her heart.

"Quite all right," said Pierce Layton. "Your daughter has just consented to be my wife."

"Oh, Sylvia, I'm so happy!" cooed Mrs. Plant.

Sylvia met the man's grim eyes, and her head went up proudly. But she said no further word, even when at parting he bowed low over her hand and kissed it.

And then he was gone. The girl stared blankly down at the big, square-faced diamond on her hand. Engaged! Engaged to be married! And he had not told her he loved her, though of course he must. He thought she was marrying him only to get her mother out of a bad hole, and he meant to give her time to learn to care for him.

She looked so helpless, so appealing, that he felt a twinge of pity. Then he remembered her betrayal of Gene, and hardened his heart against her

She went quite happily to sleep—if he only knew that she was already wildly in love with him!

BUT Pierce Layton gave her little time. He called the following morning to say he had received a wire summoning him home. It would be necessary for him to leave New York that very afternoon in order to catch the weekly steamer for New Orleans, and he wanted Sylvia to marry him at once; he had brought the license and a minister with him.

"Of course I shan't expect you to leave with me," he said, with that strange smile of his. "This is too short a notice for any bride to collect a trousseau. But we've time to be married, and you can follow me in a month or so. I'll have some work to do, anyway, to get my place ready for its new mistress." He looked deep into her eyes. "Will such an arrangement be satisfactory?"

Sylvia hesitated. It was all so different from the way she would have had it. But her mother, fearful that if Pierce Layton once escaped they'd lose him, was feverishly eager to have him tied fast before he left New York.

"Of course, of course!" she cried.

'I have here a check for ten thousand dollars," he went on. "You're to buy whatever you need out of that, and my lawyer will deposit the amount we agreed on, Mrs. Plant, to your credit every month."

"Oh! You're too generous!" The woman seized the check greedily, but the girl's cheeks burned with humiliation.

Need he make it so painfully obvious that she was being sold to him?

"And now that our business is done, I'll call in the minister and we'll proceed with the wedding." How cold — how terribly cold — was his voice!

She tried desperately to look at him, but she could not force herself to do so. And then they were standing side by side before the clergyman, who was reading out of his small book, and Mrs. Plant was weeping copious crocodile tears while Sylvia felt as if it were all a wild imagining.

She couldn't really be being married to this man, this total stranger. Yet she had felt from the first that she belonged to him, that his gods were hers, his love the one thing that would ever really matter.

"And I pronounce you, man and wife!"

The words came as a shock to the girl. His wife! She was Pierce Layton's wife, for better or worse, till death them did part! She turned to him, all her heart in her eyes, trembling in a sudden ecstasy. But he was handing the minister a large greenback, and did not look at her.

Then the clergyman was gone and her new made husband was glancing at his watch.

"I've just time to get my bags and make my train," he announced briskly. "So I must be on my way."

He picked up his coat and hat, and bent on mother and daughter an ironical smile.

"*Au revoir*, ladies!"

"But — but — you haven't even kissed your bride!" cried Mrs. Plant hysterically.

His strong, tanned face hardened to a mask.

"So I haven't."

He came slowly back. Sylvia, her heart pounding like mad, lifted her lovely face to his. But the lips that brushed hers were hard and cold as ice.

"I'll be seeing you at Bayou Bartholomew within the month," he said brusquely, and was gone.

The girl stood very still, a chill cooling the rapture that had sent her blood throbbing through her body.

CHAPTER III

"YOU'RE GOING TO PAY!"

THE dingy little steamer which plied up and down from New Orleans, serving the gulf and bayou country, was nearing its next stop, Bayou Bartholomew. The lovely fair girl in the smart blue traveling ensemble stood at the rail, staring eagerly before her. For more than an hour they had been running inland up the river to reach the landing stage which was the only outlet Pierce Layton's plantation had to the world. Sylvia had been surprised at the loneliness of the country.

Although he had warned her, she had not realized that her new home was quite so inaccessibly situated in its series of swamps and bayous. The heavy, lush vegetation gave the country almost the appearance of a jungle. She had imagined there were towns and trolleys and big farms such as she was accustomed to see in the rural East. She was unprepared for the widely separated plantations, each comprising thousands of acres, and each having its own dock on the river where the steamer called once a week.

Yet wild as it was, there was something beautiful and fascinating about the land. She felt its weird charm, and her heart beat wildly as they neared their destination. At the end of the tedious journey waited Pierce, and she had counted the days—nay, the hours—till they should meet again. Her husband, who had yet to learn that she loved him. She was even glad that they were to live together in a place so shut off from the world.

"I'm afraid you're going to be mighty lonely," the captain said to her. "This country's mighty rough for ladies. Most of the plantation owners keep their wives in New Orleans or Biloxi."

But Sylvia only smiled.

"I shan't be lonely," she said softly. Wasn't Pierce to be there with her?

At that moment the little steamer swung around the last bend, its whistle blowing shrilly for the landing where a small group of negro roustabouts and Cajuns were gathered to watch its arrival. Sylvia's eyes strained for a glimpse of one big figure. Of course he would be there to meet her; he knew she was coming.

But Pierce was not among the curious spectators who watched the Betsy Sue warp to a landing. Sylvia was almost childishly disappointed. She had dreamed for weeks of stepping straight off the boat into eager arms. Her heart was heavy as she walked slowly down the gangplank into her new, alien world.

There was no town, only a half dozen ramshackle stores, and a few weatherbeaten shacks, all clinging to the water's edge as if fleeing the jungle that pressed jealously upon them from every side. And there was something furtive in the eyes that watched her, both furtive and unfriendly.

She was not a nervous woman, but bewilderment came upon her, and she drew a breath of relief when an old darky with a woolly gray head and wide grin came forward and stood there ducking and bowing.

"You is massa's young wife, I spects," he said beamingly. "I done

brung de carriage to meet you. I'se Gaither, miss."

He led the way to a surrey across the street. Later Sylvia was to learn that a great part of the year the roads through the marshy country were inaccessible to automobiles. Old Gaither seated her in the vehicle and put her hand bags in beside her. The trunks, he explained, would follow later by wagon.

THE old Negro clucked to the big bay horses. As the beautiful, blooded animals paced rapidly along, chilled as she had been at her reception, Sylvia again found herself yielding to the charm of the country. The great trees, dripping with Spanish moss, the solid walls of sugar cane, higher than her head, the glimpses she caught of the bayou and the swamp, coated with the vivid green of its tropical growth, the exotic, bright flowers growing in wild confusion fascinated her.

It was a strange, barbaric land, but it was Pierce's land. Then they came out on the house itself in its clearing, and she loved it, too, because it was to be their home. It was a big, rambling Colonial house, with wide verandas and tall columns wreathed in clematis.

"Here we is, missy — welcome home!" chuckled old Gaither.

But Sylvia was watching the big front door. No doubt Pierce had deliberately waited so they could meet here with no curious onlookers. But old Gaither led the way up the broad stone steps where a neat mulatto maid was waiting, and still of her husband there was no sign.

"Your—your master?" she asked.

The colored man and woman exchanged uneasy glances.

"Massa Pierce, he had to go away back on the place," explained Gaither. "He say he see you at dinner, miss."

Sylvia tried not to show her disappointment, but she felt the slight keenly. She followed the two servants through a great hall and up a wide, branching stair to a big room with an open fireplace and many windows. It was spacious and dignified, and bright with gay hangings and flowers.

"I'se Mamie, miss, and I'se to do nothing but wait on you," said the small maid.

Plainly she was enchanted, like old Gaither, with her beautiful new mistress.

"Thank you," said Sylvia, and tried to smile.

But the ache in her heart persisted. Never had an afternoon seemed so long, though she explored her new home and found that, for all its isolation, no expense had been spared to make it beautiful and luxurious. Her trunks came, and Mamie unpacked, exclaiming delightedly at the smart costumes Sylvia had purchased because she wanted Pierce to admire her in them. And she wore the pick of the lot that night, an exquisite white chiffon. For wasn't she a bride? Wasn't this really her wedding night? And never had she been lovelier than when she descended the stair, slender and stately in her trailing draperies with her cheeks vivid and her violet eyes alight, for Pierce was home. He had sent word he was waiting in the drawing-room. Sylvia's pulses pounded. She was going to her bridegroom!

ON the threshold she hesitated a moment. The man standing by the window staring toward the swamp had not heard her. She had a moment to control her racing heart.

How handsome he was, how big and strong he looked. Now at last he would crush her in his arms, tell her he loved her, give her the right to confess her love for him. She would put her arms around that tall, fair head, pull it down to hers, teach him to be no longer cold—

Then he turned, and their eyes met. And his face was a rock, his smile a bitter, twisted mockery.

"Ah, so here you are," he said, without even offering his hand. "And I wager you think you've reached the jumping-off place."

She was taken back, bewildered.

"It is — a — a wild country, but—but beautiful," she faltered.

Did he sneer? She almost thought so.

"Shall we go in to dinner?" he asked.

It was a singularly strained, uncomfortable hour they spent in the beautiful old dining room with its waxen candles gleaming on polished mahogany and costly silver and glass. The food was excellent and irreproachably served. But the man at the head of the table was cold and silent, and his manner chilled the girl. And always about his strong, ruthless mouth played that strange smile that almost frightened her.

She was relieved when they rose from the table, though she winced at the look with which he drew back for her to precede him into the drawing-room. She had a feeling that he had been biding his time for this moment. He closed the folding doors behind them, and crossing his arms on his chest, turned and faced her. Her heart gave a strangled leap. She could no longer deceive herself. It was not love she read in his eyes, but a dreadful enmity, a horrible contempt!

"Bought and paid for!" he sneered at her. "Purchased with cold cash and delivered into my hands!"

She went cold.

"What is it? Why—why do you look at me as though you hate me?" she said faintly.

He gave a bitter laugh.

"Because I do hate you! I have every cause! Did you flatter yourself your beauty had turned my head at a glance? You fool! I bought you and paid for you for one reason only—to see you suffer as you made my brother suffer!"

"Your—your brother?" she faltered.

"Gene Falk was my half-brother! You didn't know that or you'd never have come to this lonely place and put yourself in my power, would you? He is dead! You killed him! But did you care? He died raving at your cruelty, and for that you're going to pay, so help me God! You're here at my mercy, mine to torture just as you tortured him, mine to do as I please with! And I please to crush you the way you crushed him, to break you, to see you shed a thousand tears for every one he shed, to make you beg for mercy, as he begged you—in vain!"

On and on went the terrible, scourging voice, but the girl heard no more. A dreadful giddiness possessed her. Her knees buckled under her. She tried to steady herself, but failed. With a little moan she swayed and pitched senseless to the floor. And the man first let her lie; then, with a muttered curse, stooped and gathered her roughly up. Her lovely, flowerlike face lay on his arm. For a moment, as he gazed down at her, his expression softened.

"Beautiful!" he thought. "She's so infernally beautiful."

And then he remembered all her

beauty had done to Gene, and his mouth hardened. He carried her upstairs, laid her on her bed and summoned the maid.

"See to your mistress. She is tired from her journey and has fainted," he said and strode to his own room.

It was the sound of his key locking the door between them which Sylvia heard when she struggled painfully back to consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

"ZASA!"

"I FETCHED your breakfast up on a tray, Miss Sylvia."

It was morning. Sylvia, shadows like bruises under her violet eyes, turned from the window where she had been staring dully out at the gray, sullen rain.

"Massa done gone. He say he be busy all day about the place."

Sylvia winced. She had seen Pierce ride away on a great brute of a black stallion. She had watched him from her window, safely hidden by the draperies, though she need not have feared. He had not once glanced up toward her room.

"Thank you, Mamie, you're very kind."

The little maid beamed.

"Is you feeling better to-day?" she asked eagerly.

A wry smile twisted Sylvia's lovely mouth. Would she ever feel better? Could anything ever heal that great, gaping wound in her heart?

"Yes, thank you," she said evenly. For out of the wreckage of her dreams she was determined to save one thing—her pride. Pierce Layton had brought her here to crush her, to break her spirit. That satisfaction he should never have. If he killed her she would not ask for mercy.

He hated her! So be it! She hated him also! Last night he had killed the love she had been so eager to pour out to him, killed it and trampled her heart beneath his feet! He was already revenged, if he only knew. But—her mouth set—she would die before she ever let him know.

"Missy"—Mamie, looking confused and uneasy, appeared in the doorway—"that Cajun girl Zasa is here to see you."

"Zasa?" Sylvia inquired.

"Yes'm." The little colored girl tossed her head. "She helps around the house sometimes and brings fish and berries and things to sell. She here now." Under her breath she added: "Poor white trash!"

"Send her up," said Sylvia, but her hand trembled.

Was it possible this was the girl who—

"Good morning, Mrs. Layton," murmured a rich, husky-sweet voice from the door, a voice that somehow contrived to be insolent for all the fact that its owner attempted to seem respectful.

But it was impossible for Zasa, the untamed, to be anything but what she was, a gorgeously exotic and disturbing creature, even in the cheap red dress which was pulled too tightly about her body. Across the room her wild black eyes stared boldly at the delicate, highly bred beauty of the woman who was Pierce Layton's wife. Though she didn't understand, some sixth sense told Sylvia that the smile on the other's mouth was treacherous.

"How do you do?" she murmured. "You wished to see me?"

"To be sure, madame. I'm in and out of M'sieu Pierce's house a lot and

I'm naturally curious to meet our new mistress." Again her words were respectful enough, but the tone was not.

Sylvia's eyes narrowed.

"And your name is?"

"Zasa, madame—Zasa Patou."

Sylvia's breath quickened. The girl to whom Gene Falk had been secretly married! Sylvia had not thrown the boy over because he was penniless. She had been ready to go through with the marriage out of sheer pity, until she got an anonymous letter saying Gene already had a wife. And here she was, an intimate of Pierce's house!

Sylvia's face whitened. Gene had told her Zasa was as anxious as he for their marriage to be secret, because she had fallen desperately in love with his brother. No wonder her black eyes took in Sylvia insolently. Pierce had probably told her the whole story. Gene had said the man didn't live who could be proof against Zasa's sensuous charms if she wanted to beguile him.

Sylvia had sworn to herself she hated Pierce Layton, yet she was appalled at the white-hot jealousy which ran through her when she met the girl's disdainful eyes.

"Now that you have seen me, you may go," she said sharply.

Zasa shrugged her shoulders.

"But surely, madame."

She swaggered from the room, and Sylvia's hands clenched as she stared after her. If she had had any faint hope of telling Pierce the truth, of making him understand how he had wronged her, that idea was gone now. But she would not go to him with the truth that Gene had only himself to blame for his end, that it was Zasa, not Sylvia, who had ruined him. Never would she cringe and beg for mercy of the man who had married her and brought her here simply to crush her soul. He had bought her, but he should not break her. Her delicate face set in hard white lines. She hated him!

ONLY the bitterness of a woman scorned enabled her to sit quietly through dinner that evening. Not for her life would she have betrayed to the grim-faced man opposite the misery and desolation in her heart. Never had she been more carefully dressed; never had her proud face looked more serene.

"I'm afraid you've had a very boring day," he murmured mockingly. "It must seem very dull here after New York."

She smiled evenly. Of course he had built his hopes on the sheer monotony of this life wearing down her nerves.

"On the contrary, I've rather enjoyed the change."

"The novelty will soon wear off, I fear," he rejoined.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps."

"Loneliness eats out the heart," he went on.

"So I've heard."

"But then," he said and laughed openly this time, "you have no heart."

She took the insult with a smile.

"You think so?"

"I know so!" he cried roughly and got to his feet.

He had set out to bait her, but she had held her own. Her lovely mouth hardened; for every wound he dealt her she meant to deal him one.

And then her triumph died a quick death. Outside there was a low whistle. Pierce strode out on the veranda and Sylvia caught a glimpse of Zasa waiting for him before he shut the door behind him. Every drop of blood in Sylvia's slim body caught fire.

She fairly ran upstairs and flung herself across her bed to weep with an abandon that terrified her.

She could not know that Pierce Layton had turned on the Cajun girl with a frown.

"Why are you hanging around here?" he demanded. "Get out and stay out!"

"But that woman, with all her pink and white and gold, she does not love you, and you don't love her!" cried Zasa. "I know you lock your door against her. And I—oh, M'sieu Pierce, Zasa is one wild ache for your arms, your kisses!"

"Be gone!" cried the man harshly. "I've told you a thousand times I want nothing to do with you. Get away from here!"

She went.

Alone the man stood for a long time, staring at the night, moody, wretched, bitter. But Sylvia knew nothing of that. She knew only that he had gone outside to meet Zasa, and that it was very late when he came up to bed; she knew that because she had lain listening feverishly for his step, and had shrunk involuntarily when she heard him try the door between their rooms, to make sure that it was locked.

CHAPTER V

"YOU BRUTE!"

IT was undoubtedly Layton's idea that the loneliness of the plantation would prove unendurable to his wife. It would have, had she been the shallow, vain butterfly he imagined her. But Sylvia had long been weary of her old life, and in a way she welcomed the quiet and peace at Bayou Bartholomew. She had far more resources within herself than her husband dreamed. To his chagrin she managed to fill her days with many activities which interested her.

She loved books, and so, evidently, did Pierce Layton, for there was a splendid library in his house in which she reveled. She had had so little time for any serious reading since she left school. And there was her music, of which she might have made a great deal, had her mother not refused even to hear of her going in for a career. It was a joy to the girl to be able to spend hours at the big grand piano in the drawing-room, a relief to pour out all her torment in music.

And then, though there were plenty of servants, she found things to do about the household, things that no servant ever does which make all the difference between a house and a home—flowers for everywhere, menus more carefully planned, convenient ash trays, small things, but adding much to the comfort and beauty of the place as they did. But if Pierce Layton was aware that his ménage moved more smoothly, due to her thoughtfulness and care, he gave no sign.

However, he was increasingly and irritatingly aware of the fact that the girl he had brought there to punish was by no means as unhappy as he had expected. Even his studied rudeness seemed to leave her untouched. She never betrayed her hurt. She never complained. She refused to whimper. In the end it was his nerves which began to suffer.

"She's got far more pluck than I dreamed," he told himself more than once.

Fortunately, he did not know how forced was the smile with which she met his cold, sardonic eyes, nor how often she wept herself to sleep. But neither did she know that many times

when she was pouring out her heart at the piano, he stood near, his presence unsuspected by her, and listened, his face twisted with pain.

"God! How can she play like that and yet have neither a conscience nor a soul!" he'd wonder.

And then because he was afraid, he'd force himself to turn away, anywhere to escape the sight of that lovely, wistful face which was beginning to haunt him.

It was three days before Christmas that Sylvia had an unexpected caller, the first since her arrival except old Dr. Bain, who had come only once. When she had gone upstairs she had heard her husband and the old physician quarreling fiercely, and since then the latter had not returned.

"A gentleman to see *me* in the drawing-room, Mamie?" asked Sylvia, startled. "But who can it be?"

Mamie looked curiously sullen.

"It's that Mr. Beverley from over on the next plantation."

Sylvia knew that her husband's land adjoined that of a Blair Beverley, but she had never seen the man and had heard little about him. Pierce never seemed to care to discuss him, but then, there was very little Pierce did condescend to discuss with her.

She had no way of knowing that Beverley was her husband's bitter enemy. He had tried to cheat Pierce out of a large strip of fertile land, only to be completely outwitted and humiliated in the bargain. And Beverley was a vindictive, cowardly sort, who never forgot an old score. But his manner to Pierce Layton's wife was ingratiating in the extreme.

"Behold in me," he announced gayly, "your nearest neighbor, though I am not much at home." He was a fine-looking man, dark, suave, well-groomed. "But now that the wilderness has bloomed"—he gave her a flattering smile—"I vow I'll find it hard to tear myself away."

He was evidently struggling to make an impression, but Sylvia did not like him.

"I hastened over as soon as I arrived to meet you," he went on, "because I've heard such glowing tales of what a beauty old Pierce has been lucky enough to marry. I confess I expected to be disappointed. I didn't really believe you could be as lovely as people said. But I—you are, you know, more so—oh, a thousand times more so!"

Too many men had raved about Sylvia's beauty for her head ever to be turned by such gross flattery.

"Thank you," she said quietly, and moved a little away.

"The main thing, however," he went on cordially, "is, I've brought down a house party for over Christmas, and we're having a dance tonight. Won't you come?"

He was watching her narrowly, but she knew of no reason to refuse.

"Why, you're very kind. We'll be delighted."

She had not realized he had not included her husband in the invitation. He gave her an odd look.

"You won't disappoint me?"

"Absolutely not."

He smiled.

"You must be about fed up on this lonely life; you're not used to it. Any woman would rebel." Still she did not understand. "Till to-night, then."

A mocking smile flitted across his face as he walked homeward.

"She's the loveliest thing I ever saw," he told himself. "And she's proud and spirited, and he neglects her shamefully, so everybody says." He

licked his thin lips. "And she's coming to my party—she promised, and I bet she keeps her word. She's that sort."

IT had not occurred to Sylvia there would be any difficulty about keeping the promise. She was totally surprised at the black scowl with which Pierce received her news of the invitation.

"Of course you refused," he said harshly.

"Why, no. I—I accepted."

"Without consulting me?" he demanded.

His tone was an insult; he had meant it to be.

"I am no servant to ask your leave to take an evening off," she told him.

"No?" His lip curled.

"No," she said flatly.

He flung her a contemptuous glance.

"You're mine, and you'll take my orders. I thought you knew that. *You are not going to Beverley's tonight nor any other time!*"

Had he deigned to explain that Blair Beverley and his friends were a bunch of rotters, and his enemies as well, things might have been different. But he offered no explanation. He simply ordered her blindly to obey, as he might have commanded one of the blacks about the place. Sylvia, staring after him with a face as hard and white as his own, had not the slightest intention of being cowed.

"He's determined to break my spirit," she thought, "but he shall never do it!"

Not another word was said on the subject. Apparently Pierce believed that none was necessary. After dinner he shut himself up in his office as usual. But Sylvia went to her room and put on one of her loveliest evening gowns, an alluring, heavenly blue chiffon with a tight, jeweled bodice and full skirts.

"Law, Miss Sylvia, you look plumb gorgeous!" breathed Mamie. "Is we going to have some company tonight?"

"Why, no," said Sylvia evenly. "I'm going to a dance over at Mr. Beverley's."

The little maid looked startled and confused. Her black eyes rolled.

"You shorely ain't, Miss Sylvia!" she protested.

But Sylvia had already caught up her white lamé evening wrap with the high ermine collar. Downstairs, it is true, she hesitated a moment outside the closed library door. Then her lovely face hardened. Let Pierce Layton learn he could not order her around like a dog. She hurried out to where old Gaither had the carriage waiting.

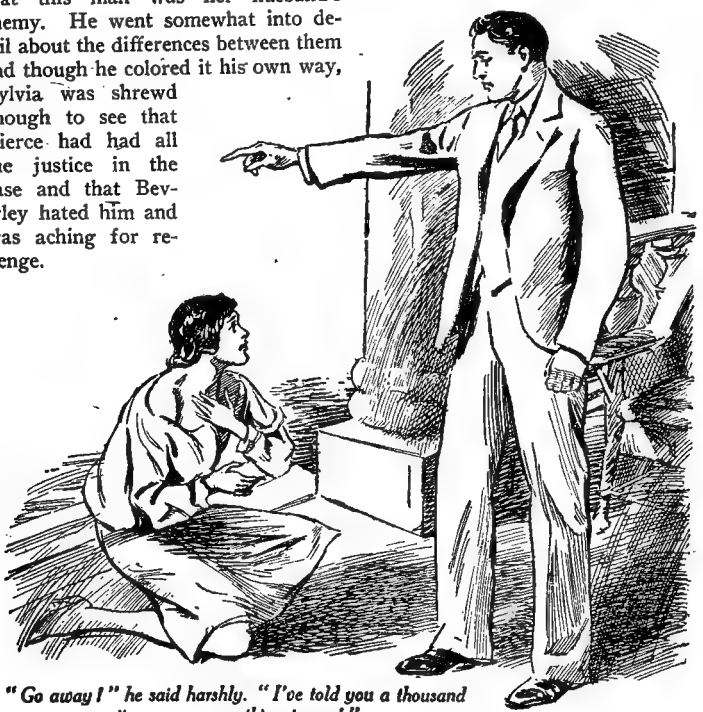
But from the minute she entered the great, crowded drawing-rooms of the Beverley plantation, she wished she hadn't come. In the first place, Blair Beverley himself was far too effusive. His bright, shallow eyes feasted themselves too boldly on her beauty. His purring tongue jarred her with its too extravagant compliments. He was plainly elated that she had come to his house without her husband.

And his guests, to whom he presented her with an air of proprietorship she resented, were not what she had expected. It took her only a short while to discover that they were a boisterous, racy crowd, the men loud and coarse, the women common and overdressed. They had all had too many highballs, and when her host danced with her, he held her uncomfortably close and revealed more than he would have had he been soberer.

"God! You're beautiful!" he breathed while she drew away uneasi-

ly. "And don't I feel complimented that you came? I know old Pierce is fighting mad!" He laughed. "He hates me like poison. I reckon he'd rather have you out with the devil than with me!"

She started. It was her first hint that this man was her husband's enemy. He went somewhat into detail about the differences between them and though he colored it his own way, Sylvia was shrewd enough to see that Pierce had had all the justice in the case and that Beverley hated him and was aching for revenge.



"Go away!" he said harshly. "I've told you a thousand times you are nothing to me!"

"I bet he's sulking at home like a poisoned pup, knowing his beautiful bride's here dancing with me," he went on gleefully.

Sylvia winced. Unwittingly she had played into the hands of her husband's enemy. What a fool she had been! This man and his friends were no fit associates for her. Why hadn't Pierce explained? Her one thought was to get away as quickly as possible.

"But you can't leave so early! You've only just arrived," cried Beverley, chagrined and furiously disappointed. He had fondly believed he had made a conquest of Pierce Layton's lovely young wife.

"I'm sorry, I really must," said Sylvia firmly. "Will you have my carriage brought around?"

"But I insist you—" Blair Beverley paused, his eyes going suddenly beyond her while his face turned gray.

On the threshold, grim, stern, implacable, stood Pierce Layton, his eyes fixed scornfully on his wife.

UNDER that deadly look Blair Beverley slowly released her.

"Get your cloak, Sylvia. I'm taking you out of this!" Pierce's tone was like the lash of a whip.

Every one in the room caught his breath, and Sylvia went deathly white. He could not have spoken more contemptuously had she been some ignorant Cajun he was ordering around. He was publicly, cruelly humiliating her. Her lips hardened. Let him look to himself!

"I am not ready to go, Pierce," she said coldly, and turned to her host again. "Shall we go on dancing, Mr. Beverley?"

An exultant smile spread over the man's sleek face.

"Oh, delighted!" he fawned, and held out his arms.

But he reckoned without the other man. In two quick strides Pierce Layton was beside them.

"Release my wife!" he cried.

Beverley hesitated.

"Mrs. Layton wishes to dance with me," he said mockingly. "And who am I to deny a lovely lady who has a weakness for me?"

He did not quite complete his remark. Pierce's big fist shot out. Blair went down before the impact like a log and lay there groaning and cursing. Sylvia cried out in sheer horror. Beverley's friends murmured threateningly. Pierce Layton turned on them with curling lip.

"If any of you want to take up this little matter, I'm ready," he said, and his gray eyes looked dangerous.

No one stirred. "Come, Sylvia!" He caught her by the arm.

"You brute!" she cried furiously.

He smiled.

"Are you coming?" he asked.

"No!"

Before she could guess his purpose he stooped and picked her up bodily. She was as helpless as a child in his grasp. Tears of rage and humiliation streamed down her cheeks. He paid no heed nor did he put her down till they were outside, where he deposited her roughly in the carriage.

"Home, Gaither," he snapped. "I'll follow on horseback."

Sylvia by the hardest effort had regained her composure when they reached the house. Her face was as white and hard as a stone when she walked toward the stair. Her husband stood aside for her to pass.

"After this when I give orders you'll know to obey them!" he said. "And if you go to that man's house again I'll beat you like a dog!"

Her lip curled; her eyes gave him back scorn for scorn. "I have no doubt," she said cuttingly, "that you are capable of every form of cowardice."

He took a threatening step toward her, but she did not flinch.

"How I hate you!" she breathed.

He laughed, then, and turned on his heel.

"That's mutual!" he said.

Neither knew that outside Zasa watched and smiled to herself.

CHAPTER VI

"VOODOO!"

"DEBBIL DOCTOR," the blacks called him, and shivered when they passed his hut far back in the junglelike depths of the swamp, particularly if there was a red light

burning within. For that eerie glow meant that the shriveled old man with his beady serpent's eyes and evil, wrinkled face was at work at his caldron, brewing spells, spells that could work magic, *voodoo magic.*

There were weird tales told of the debbil doctor. And to-night as he stared at the visitor who had stolen through the devious trails of the swamps to see him, he looked not unlike a vicious spider, spinning deadly webs.

"You want me to cook you magic that make Boss Layton love you?" he demanded craftily.

Zasa, wild as she was, shivered a little. Even she was afraid of the old voodoo man, and only despair could have driven her to seek his aid.

"Yes, yes," she cried feverishly. "I — I'm mad about him, and he—he—I've got to have him! I can't live if he doesn't love me!"

"Boss Layton no friend of mine," he protested sullenly.

She knew that. Pierce Layton hated the hold that the old voodoo priest had over the superstitious minds of the negroes on the plantation; he and Dr. Bain had long struggled together to destroy the evil old man's influence. It was due to their steady campaign against him that old Abel had finally had to hide out in the swamps, where his profits were much more meager and his life far less comfortable. Yes, the debbil doctor had cause to hate Pierce Layton.

"I know he's no friend of yours," she acknowledged, "but I — I'll pay you well for—for a love potion."

The old man's vicious, muddy eyes lit.

"How much?" he asked greedily.

She drew out a bag that was filled with coins, enough to make the old witch doctor lick his lips covetously. But still he hesitated.

"You swear you never tell? Boss Layton or Boss Dr. Bain skin me alive if they know. You swear if you tell, voodoo gets you!"

Again she shivered. She had heard dreadful tales of what happened to folks who crossed this evil old man with his devil's caldron.

"I swear!"

He turned, reached above his head to the rafters of the smoky cabin from which hung bats' hides, rattlesnakes' rattles, and other horrid things that pertained to his profession. From an old can he took a handful of dried herbs, crushed them to a powder, muttered over them a weird incantation that chilled Zasa's blood, and then dropped the preparation into an old tobacco sack and pressed it into her trembling fingers.

"Put this in something he drink, but be sure no one see, and"—he fixed her with his beady, glittering eyes—"remember, you *never* tell that I give you something to feed him."

"Never!" cried the girl almost hysterically, her one thought to get away.

But once outside she clutched the sack to her heart.

"Now he'll love me! He'll be mine!" she cried triumphantly.

Back in the hut the witch doctor stooped over the lurid flames of his caldron and grinned to himself.

CHAPTER VII

"I'M DYING!"

PIERCE had gone when Sylvia rose the following morning, and as usual he did not return till dark. They met for the first time since their explosive scene the night before

at the dinner table. He was grim and taciturn, she entirely calm. She was determined not to give him the satisfaction of knowing she had put in a miserable day, made more restless by the fact that the girl Zasa had hung around the place all afternoon. Scarcely a word was said at table. The silence was getting on Sylvia's nerves. She could not betray how near she felt to tears.

"Shall we have our coffee in the drawing-room?" she asked abruptly, anything for a respite.

"Whatever you like," he murmured, always with that mock politeness.

But as she passed the heel of her slim silver slipper tripped over a rug on the polished floor; she almost lost her balance. Instinctively he put out a hand to steady her. For a minute she clung to him and they stared into each other's eyes while her heart thundered in her ears.

There was something hungry in his gaze, something that flamed between them, that seemed to be drawing them together. She had a wild feeling that he was tempted to crush her in his arms, and every drop of blood in her body leaped. But in a second he had recovered himself and drawn away.

"You should be more careful," he said harshly.

Trembling from head to foot, Sylvia averted her face. What a fool she was! After all he had done to her, she still could flame at his touch! Was it possible she still cared for him? No, no, she would not believe it! But her hands trembled as she poured the coffee which Mamie had brought in on a silver tray and set down on a low table beside her.

"Cream?" she asked, really to gain time, because he always took cream.

"Of course," he said curtly.

He almost snatched the thin china cup from her hand and strolled over to the window to stare out at the cold, rainy night.

The sound of his cup crashing on the floor first made her look at him. He was reeling where he stood, pulling at his collar, his face agonized.

"Pierce, Pierce, what is it?" She started up, ran toward him.

"God, I can't breathe! I'm choking! I'm dying!" he cried. "That coffee! It was—" He stared at her wildly. "That coffee's poisoned! You've poisoned me! You said you hated me, and you do! And now you've killed me!"

"No, no!" she cried.

But he didn't hear; he had pitched senseless to the floor at her feet. In an agony she knelt beside him, gathered him into her arms.

"Pierce, Pierce, speak to me! Oh, my beloved, my darling!"

For he was dying there on her breast and there was no longer any use to deceive herself. No matter what he had done to her, she loved him; she always had; she always would.

CHAPTER VIII

"SEND ZASA!"

HOURS later—past midnight. Dr. Bain, his face gray and tired, came out of the sick room. Sylvia, trembling with suspense, looked up at him, afraid to ask the fatal question.

"He'll live," he said slowly, and her heart gave a great agonized leap of relief. "It was fortunate that you got word to me so quickly. Had I been a little later I could not have saved him."

She swayed.

"Was—was it really poison?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But who—who could have—"

"You drank the coffee?" he asked.

She nodded.

"With cream?"

She shook her head; then her eyes widened.

"Could it be—do you think—"

"Is the coffee service still in the drawing-room?"

"I—I suppose so." She felt sure that in all the excitement no one had thought to remove it.

But when she led the way they discovered that the cream pitcher was missing.

"And the cup from which he drank was broken, I understand?" The doctor pursed his lips.

"Yes. But it surely must have been an accident," she faltered. "No one here would have made a deliberate attempt on his life. The—the servants are devoted to him."

Again he looked at her curiously and she flushed.

"Has he said who he thinks—who—"

He nodded gravely, and she began again to tremble.

"Doctor, you don't believe—you can't believe I—I—"

"No," he said. "I don't think you poisoned your husband, Mrs. Layton."

"Oh, thank you!" she breathed.

"But he does," he added grimly.

She drew back as if he had struck her.

"Can I see him? Is he conscious?"

He hesitated.

"Yes, but I—"

"Then I *will* see him," she cried and turned quickly toward the stair.

For death had come very close to Sylvia that night and before its grim reality her pride had collapsed. She loved Pierce! She was his wife! She was partly to blame for the way he felt about her. She should long ago have told him the truth, that he had no real reason to hate her. She was ready at last to fling herself on his mercy, to confess she loved him, to beg him not to go on hating her.

"Wait!" cried Dr. Bain.

But she was running up the stair. Pierce had almost died. Surely when he knew that she loved him, that she had never wronged him or his, he would relent. He might even in time come to care for her. All her heart was in her eyes as she crossed the threshold of the sick room, but the man on the bed saw none of the tenderness there. He beheld only the woman who had every cause to want him out of her way, the woman who at his death would be rich and free.

"You!" he cried, staring up, his eyes wild in a haggard face. "You dare come here! You who as good as murdered my brother and who tried to-night to murder me! You with the face of an angel and the heart of a fiend! Get out! And stay out of my room!"

"But it isn't true," she said brokenly. "I didn't poison you! I wouldn't harm a hair of your head! I—I—"

He laughed contemptuously.

"Take her away, doctor," he cried. "I won't have her here! She hates me, and she'll kill me yet if she can."

"Pierce, old chap, I'm sure you're mistaken," said Dr. Bain anxiously.

The sick man's lips curled.

"So you've said all along. We quarreled before because you swore I was wrong about her, wrong to think her cruel and treacherous! And she had almost convinced me you were right till she did this thing to-night. I—even I had begun to fall for her angel face! But now I know! And I won't have her here, I tell you!"

"You'd better go, Mrs. Layton," said the doctor in a low voice. "He's still very weak and not entirely out of the woods, and your presence is making him worse."

"But he needs some one to nurse him! Please, Pierce"—Sylvia humbled herself in the dust—"let me stay and take care of you. Before God, I—I—" She was going to blurt out the bitter truth, that no matter how he hated her she loved him desperately.

But the man on the bed interrupted her.

"Send Zasa!" he cried. "I can at least trust her. She's always loved me! She'd die for me!"

And with a face white as death, his wife turned and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

"DON'T TOUCH ME!"

TO Sylvia the week which followed was a nightmare. Shut out of her husband's room, with Zasa doing the things which she hungered to do, Zasa with a gloating smile on her sensuous lips nursing Pierce back to health while his wife hadn't even the right to cross his threshold. It was a bitter draught Sylvia drained that week.

No wonder she grew white and there were shadows under her eyes. Suspected by the man she loved of having attempted to kill him, superseded in her own house by the girl who all along had been madly infatuated with her husband, forced to stand by and hear Zasa give orders there as if it were her home, not Sylvia's. And helpless, terribly helpless to do anything about it!

Pierce Layton had brought his wife there to crush her, and that week he very nearly succeeded. A dreadful despair possessed her. She was so alone. And she loved him so! But he hated her; he could not bear her in his sight. She fell into a sort of coma of misery, so complete her one thought began to be escape. Peace at any price—anything to be rid of the bitter pain in her heart.

And on the night Dr. Bain pronounced his patient entirely recovered and prophesied that the next day should see Pierce going about as well as ever, Sylvia's anguish crystallized into a desperate resolve. She had been repeatedly warned of the dangers of the swamp, told again and again never to venture beyond its fringes if she went walking. But that night the dank and eerie morass seemed to draw her. The thought of the green and treacherous wastes fascinated her.

When the doctor had gone and the house had settled for the night, she caught up her coat and slipped out of the great front door. Not even to herself did she admit her purpose. She simply walked on and on through the bleak January night, blindly, careless of her steps, deeper and deeper into the quagmire. There were quicksands, she knew, but she did not fear them. She was so tired of being unhappy she welcomed the thought of sinking to her ankles, to her knees, to her throat, of sliding down, down, down, of burying her wretchedness with her, of never being hurt again.

But something protected her. Somehow the destiny she sought eluded her. She had stumbled on for hours. She was staggering with fatigue. She had no idea where she was. And still she kept on and on, deeper into the swamp, praying for a doom that would not come. There was only one chance in

a thousand that she could have threaded the mazes of the swamp in safety. But she did. She did not know it until she became at last aware that her feet were treading firmer ground.

She paused, startled and confused. Where was she? A light shone through the trees, and she could make out a big house some distance away. Still she had no idea of her whereabouts. But at that moment a dog barked and ran toward her.

"Who dar?" called a soft voice.

He, too, was running toward her. Sylvia turned to flee back to the swamp, stumbled and fell, and knew no more.

"WHERE am I?" she said faintly.

Some one was chafing her wrists. She lay beside a blazing open fire on a couch, and somebody was supporting her in his arms while he tried to pour a pungent liquor down her throat. She stared wildly. It was Blair Beverley! She was in his house! It was one of his servants who had found her and brought her, unconscious, to his master.

"You're perfectly all right," said the man soothingly. "Drink this and you'll feel tiptop."

"But I'm myself now." She brushed the glass away. "I must go home—at once."

What would Pierce say if he knew she was here in this house long after midnight? She started wildly up.

"Please, won't you send me back at once?" She was muddy and dishevelled and bitterly tired, but, even so, beautiful enough to inflame the man.

"Of course I'll send you home," he drawled; "but what's the rush? I'm here alone and lonely. You must be very tired. Why can't we sit by the fire and rest and talk and have a little supper? I've some excellent champagne, and I — I" — he came nearer, tried to slip an arm about her—"I'm mad about you, Sylvia, mad!"

She drew back.

"Don't!" she cried sharply.

He laughed.

"I've wanted you alone with me worse than I ever wanted anything in my life, and now I've got you. I'd be a fool to let you go, you darling!"

He lunged toward her, tried to seize her in his arms. She went frantic with fear. No use to scream; there was no one to hear.

"Don't dare to touch me!" she panted.

He laughed and leaped toward her, but he came up sharply. In her hand she held a small, pearl-handled revolver, and thanked God that ever since the day she came across it in an old desk of Pierce's, she had carried it in her bosom.

"Come one step nearer and I'll kill you!" she cried.

He hesitated, but there was no mistaking her deadly intent. He stumbled back, tried to grin.

"Sorry—my mistake."

Her lip curled.

"Now will you send me home?" she asked.

There was nothing else for him to do. A carriage was brought around and he bowed her into it with what grace he could. The road which led around the swamp was much longer than the one she had traveled. It was after three when Sylvia made Blair Beverley's driver let her out a short distance from the house.

Apparently every one was sound asleep as she stole up the drive. And yet she had a curious feeling she was observed, though she heard nothing.

Later she knew some one had seen her stealthy entrance. But that night, utterly exhausted, she fell across her bed and slept as if in a stupor.

CHAPTER X

"GO!"

THE next day Pierce was off about the plantation before Sylvia waked. She did not see him till she joined him for dinner. It was their first meeting since he had driven her from his room the night of his illness, and she both dreaded and longed for the encounter. Apparently she had no pride left, she told herself bitterly, because even though he despised her, her eyes were hungry for a glimpse of him and, cold and scowling as were the glances he gave her, yet it was heaven just to be near him again.

"I'm glad you—are completely recovered," she faltered.

"I'm sure you are," he sneered.

She flushed.

"Pierce, I—I—you can't believe it was I who—who did that ghastly thing?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who else has any reason to want me out of the way?" he demanded.

She drooped.

"I don't know, but you—you're wrong, terribly wrong, if—if you think I hate you. Because I—I, really, I—"

He laughed contemptuously.

"I suppose you *love* me! You've so much reason to!"

She swallowed painfully.

"Would you believe me if—if I said I do?"

"Never!"

Her lips quivered, and she made a pleading gesture. He drew back.

"No use trying to work your wiles on me," he said through his teeth. "No doubt you'd like to get me crazy about you and then make *me* suffer. But you'll never do that! I'd die before I let myself care for you."

It was so hopeless, so cruelly hopeless. She shivered.

"Let me go away," she cried brokenly, and then could have bitten out her tongue because she had sworn never to beg.

"So you are weakening at last," he said.

She sighed.

"It's only that I—that you—"

"Here you stay to the bitter end, if it kills us both."

His face looked suddenly drawn and haggard. Something in his eyes lit a wild hope in her heart. Could it be—was it possible he was not so indifferent as he seemed?

"Pierce, I—please do not hate me, please—please"—she was at last pleading with him for mercy—"love me a little."

She leaned toward him, and again something flamed between them. She felt the terrible effort he was making not to respond to her.

"Don't!" he cried, almost with a groan. "You—I—you're too beautiful!"

A wild rapture darted through her. She believed in another minute he would crush her to him. All her senses reeled at the thought, but just then Zasa knocked at the door and called him outside. When he returned his face was livid.

"Where were you last night?" he thundered.

Sylvia shrank. In his hand he held a bedraggled scarf. Too late she remembered that she had worn it when she fell outside Blair Beverley's house.

But she had not thought of it since. She began to tremble.

"Where were you, I repeat, until three this morning?"

She could not speak, and his face went black with fury.

"You needn't answer. I know. You were with that rotter, Beverley. Zasa saw you sneaking in here like a thief!"

"But, Pierce, I—you don't understand—I—"

He laughed bitterly.

"I understand all right, too well! So while I was ill, that's what you've been doing—meeting Beverley. Something neither of you would have dared had I been about!"

"No, no! It isn't true!"

He took a threatening step toward her.

"I ought to kill you, you treacherous, double-crossing vampire, out with Beverley last night and to-night trying to wind me about your lovely fingers. Oh, you *are* lovely, I admit it! Lovely enough to drive any man mad, even one who knows, as I do, how worthless you are—who despises you! Awhile ago you begged me to love you and—and, God help me, I almost fell! That angel face of yours, it haunts me. But love you, no, never! I hate you! I loathe you!"

He had driven her too far.

"You lie!" she cried. "You do love me! It's in your eyes, your voice! You may hate me, but you want me, too! You'd give your life to take me in your arms!"

He had gone as white as death.

"It isn't true—I won't let it be true," he said.

And this time it was she who laughed. At the sound he lost his head. With a groan that was almost a sob, he caught her to him, crushed her brutally against him, kissed her fiercely, madly, wildly, until her body flamed beneath his passionate caresses and both trembled at the turbulence of emotions that left them shaken and spent.

"Pierce, Pierce, beloved!" she whispered.

But then he flung her from him.

"Go! Leave me!" he said violently. "I will not—I'll die before I care for you!"

She went, but a new happiness throbbed through her. He did love her! In spite of all he believed against her, he had not been able to resist her appeal. She could not sleep for joy. He was hers, even if he would not acknowledge it. And when she went to him and cleared up all these misunderstandings, he would beg her forgiveness and then—her heart pounded with rapture—he would kiss her as he had to-night, but he would not send her away.

"And I *will* tell him everything to-morrow," she promised herself, "and make him believe!"

CHAPTER XI

"CAPTURED!"

BUT when she rose the next morning it was to learn that Pierce had ridden off very early and was not expected back for three days.

In spite of this she was radiantly happy. It was sheer nervous energy that drove her out for a long walk that afternoon; she felt curiously restless. It was cold and clear and brisk. She skirted the swamp carefully. It no longer drew her, for now she had everything to live for. Pierce loved her, and, sooner or later, he would come to her and say so and they would be happy. She knew how gloriously happy they could be!

It was pure accident that she came out noiselessly on the little clearing, far from the house, and sheer instinct that caused her to pause abruptly and watch when she saw Zasa standing under a tree, evidently waiting for some one.

She saw how nervously Zasa started when from the swamp came an old man, a thin shriveled figure with an evil spider's face, the *debbie doctor*. Sylvia recognized him from awed descriptions she had heard from the blacks about the house, each of whom feared the old voodoo man. And apparently Zasa feared him too, for she was trembling as old Abel came up to her.

"Well, I'm here. What do you want?" she asked uneasily.

The debbil doctor eyed her narrowly.

"Have you told who gave you dat stuff for Massa Layton?" he demanded.

"No, no! Though I should!" she cried hysterically. "You told me it was a love potion and it was poison! You tried to kill him!"

"Hush!" he cried. "Keep still or I'll kill *you!*"

Zasa drew back, shivering before his baleful glances, and Sylvia's heart leaped. So it was Zasa who had put the poison into Pierce's cream pitcher, a love potion she had procured from the old witch doctor!

"You ever tell, I set voodoo on you," warned the old man.

Zasa shook her head violently.

"I won't tell."

He scowled fiercely.

"Boss Layton have me strung up to a tree if he know," he muttered, "but he never know 'less you tell. Nobody but you could tell him, 'cause nobody else know."

But he was mistaken. Sylvia, crouching there, had heard every word. And in her perturbation she must have made some startled movement, for the old voodoo man's eyes suddenly turned in her direction.

"Who dar?" he cried and leaped forward.

She turned and ran. Behind her she heard the old negro scream.

"Catch her, Zasa! She get us both hanged if she get away and tell!"

Sylvia fled wildly, but she was no match for Zasa, child of the swamps. She heard the other girl gaining upon her. She was desperate. She quickened her pace till her heart labored and her blood pounded in her ears. If only she could get within earshot of the house, could scream for help!

Zasa was very near now. The race was not even telling on her. Sylvia lurched ahead. Far across the field she saw the distant figure of old Gaither, who had always been her friend. She opened her lips to call to him. Then something sang through the air. Zasa had hurled a dagger. It struck Sylvia's shoulder and she pitched forward. As in a dream, she felt herself being picked up and carried back the way she had come.

"Here she is!" panted Zasa. "What we going to do with her?"

Sylvia was conscious that the old debbil doctor was bending over her.

"Take her to my hut," he said venomously, "and see she never come back to carry tales!"

CHAPTER XII

"I LOVE HER"

"I TELL you, Pierce, you are mistaken!" The old doctor stared at the other man pleadingly.

Pierce Layton scowled.

"Did you follow me away down here to try to make me believe I've misjudged my own wife?"

"Yes, because I'm certain you have."

"And why?"

"In the first place, she was not to blame for what happened to Gene. I've investigated. She didn't jilt him because she learned he was penniless, but because she found out he had a living wife."

"That isn't true!"

"Yes, it is," said Dr. Bain quietly. "I don't know who—old Father Pierre wouldn't tell me—but he married Gene secretly to some girl around here, and when he learned he was trying to marry Sylvia in New York the old priest wrote to her and told her."

"I can't believe it!"

"You've got to. Father Pierre doesn't lie."

They both knew that. The old priest had labored for years as an itinerant missionary up and down the river, and no man in that whole wild country but had the greatest respect for him.

"Why, then—if—if that's true"—Pierce Layton had gone very white—"I've wronged Sylvia terribly. I—I've been a brute and a scoundrel."

"You have, indeed."

"But—but she did try to poison me after—after I'd made her hate me!"

"Nonsense! I'll never believe she had a thing to do with that!" The older man paused, eyed his friend. "You were unconscious when I arrived, but she—she was holding you in her arms, smothering you with kisses, begging you not to die!"

"You mean, you can't mean—"

"I'm sure your wife is madly in love with you."

Pierce started violently.

"It can't be! Not when I—I've been such a beast to her?"

"Did what you believed about her prevent your falling in love with her?"

He hung his head.

"No. I do love her! I'm mad about her! I tried not to care, but—she's so lovely, she—"

"And she's as good as she is beautiful," said the other earnestly. "I'd stake my life on it."

"God, what a fool I've been!"

"You have, indeed!" Dr. Bain agreed again, then started. "Here, where are you going?" Pierce was already rushing from the room.

"Home to beg my wife's forgiveness on my knees!" he cried.

He rode all night; he could not wait. Now that he had at last let down the flood gates, emotion swept him away. All along, instinct had tried to tell him that Sylvia was not treacherous or heartless. In a hundred ways she had proved herself fine. But he had blindly refused to believe his senses, stubbornly gone on refusing to yield to her.

Yet almost from the first she had attracted him. Her wistful, delicate beauty had haunted and tormented him. He had dreamed of clasping her in his arms and hated himself because he longed to do so. And now he could not wait to make his dream come true, to kneel at her feet, to pour out his love, to kiss her a thousand times.

He was tired and travel-stained but eager when he strode into his house the following morning. He had expected to find Sylvia in the drawing-room, probably at the piano. But she wasn't there, and when he rang for Mamie and asked for her mistress, the little colored maid gave him a frightened look.

"She ain't here, Massa Pierce. She—she left yesterday afternoon, and—and she ain't come back," she faltered.

He stared at her.

"Left? Hasn't come back? What do you mean?"

Mamie fell back before his stricken eyes.

"I—I—we don't know where she is," she stammered, and fled.

But Zasa had entered the room, a triumphant Zasa with a gloating smile on her full red lips and a folded piece of paper in her hand.

"I found this on her dressing table," she purred, and handed him the note which she had cleverly forged.

He read it and staggered at the blow.

"Gone! With Blair Beverley!" he whispered. "Good God!"

CHAPTER XIII

"WHEN THE MOON RISES"

IN the dingy, smoky hut far back in the swamp, Sylvia stirred and moaned on the rude pallet old Abel had fixed on the floor. The dagger had inflicted only a flesh wound in her shoulder which the old debbil doctor had carefully dressed with healing herbs. It was no part of his plan to have her die of infection.

For two days, however, fever had kept her slightly delirious. Even now that her head was clearing she scarcely realized where she was until the sight of the voodoo man crouching over his caldron and watching her with unwinking, malicious eyes brought everything back, and with it a wave of sheer horror. She struggled fiercely, but she was bound. Cords bit into her wrists and ankles. She moaned with helplessness, and the old witch doctor laughed.

"No use try to get loose," he sneered. "You never escape, never!"

"Oh!" Her senses reeled. "What are you going to do with me?"

He grinned evilly.

"To-night when moon rises, all the blacks come, my people. Lately"—he frowned—"your husband and that Dr. Bain turn them from me. To-night I make them believe in me again. Because"—he leaned forward and his wicked face was horrible—"to-night I make big voodoo here in the swamp; I sacrifice live white woman so they all come back to voodoo. I sacrifice you!"

"No, no!" she cried wildly.

But her blood ran cold. She had heard wild tales of the evil superstitious cult of the voodoo to which a great many of the ignorant people in the vicinity had been helpless slaves, and from which Pierce Layton and Dr. Bain had struggled to free them. And somehow she knew even when she denied it that this hideous old man was capable of carrying out his appalling threat. He was eager for anything to reinstate his failing influence, and he had every reason to wish her out of the way.

"My husband will kill you when he finds out," she panted.

"He never find out."

"But he will look for me when he discovers I'm missing."

"He will not look. Zasa showed him note signed with your name. He thinks you've run away with Boss Beverley to New Orleans. He never look for you here with debbil doctor."

"Oh!" Waves of despair left Sylvia giddy.

If Pierce believed she had eloped with Blair Beverley he would make no effort to find her here. He might pursue Beverley to New Orleans, but in the meanwhile— Her brain swam.

"To-night when the moon rises,"

chanted the old debbil doctor, "I cut your throat so Voodoo drink your blood!"

CHAPTER XIV

"THE MOON IS RISING!"

At first it was Pierce Layton's instinct to follow Sylvia and Beverley to the ends of the earth and kill them both. But as he raged up and down his room he gradually grew calmer, calm with despair. He had no one but himself to blame. He had threatened Sylvia with monstrous cruelty.

There had been a time when she might have loved him, but he had killed her love. He had driven her out to another man. And, head dropped in his hands, he swore finally not to stand in her way, to give her her freedom even if it broke his heart, to let her marry Beverley if she loved him.

He had lost her. The only amend he could make was to ensure her happiness. It was growing late. Darkness came, but he did not turn on a light nor stir. Thoughts, bitter and heartbreaking, held him motionless, visions of what might have been, of all he in his stubborn folly had flung away.

Gradually he grew conscious that somewhere, far, far in the distance was sounding a muffled drum. He frowned. Tom-toms!

It had been years since the workers on his place had dared sound tom-toms! What did it mean? Was there, in spite of all he had done, still some voodoo deviltry going on? He stirred, then sank back once more into his apathy. What did it matter? Sylvia was gone! He had lost her forever.

Somewhere a clock struck nine, then ten. He was dimly aware that that muffled, distant beat of the tom-toms obtruded at times, but he paid no heed. Drumming up a crowd for some sort of voodoo meeting, he had no doubt, but he was too weary and dejected to care that night. Let them have their devil worship! He was tired of trying to save them from themselves. They were half savage at the best. With plenty of bad liquor in their veins to be incited by the voodoo tom-toms, they speedily forgot all they had learned of civilization.

It was a horse galloping madly through the night, a voice hoarsely shouting his name that aroused him. He ran downstairs. Dr. Bain, breathless, his horse dripping with sweat, leaped off to meet him.

"Where's Sylvia?" he gasped.

He had evidently ridden from town in such frantic haste he was scarcely able to speak.

"Gone! Eloped with Beverley!" cried Pierce bitterly.

"That's a lie! Beverley is at his house ill—I've just been to see him. She isn't there!"

Pierce went white.

"Why, then, where can she be? She's been missing three days, and Zasa showed me a note saying she'd eloped with Beverley!"

"Zasa, Zasa! That treacherous she-cat!" cried the doctor. "Very likely she wrote the note herself."

"But then—where can Sylvia be?"

"Listen"—Dr. Bain gripped his arm—"old Sam came to me a few minutes ago and told me there was a big voodoo meeting up in the swamp, and that the debbil doctor had sent out word he was going to make a living sacrifice. He is going to cut a white woman's throat just as the moon rose and let Voodoo drink her blood!"

"My God, it can't be—oh, it couldn't be that Sylvia's in that old devil's clutches!"

Dr. Bain turned sharply to the east. A faint paleness there sent a shiver through both men.

"The moon!" cried Pierce Layton in a stifled voice. "The moon is rising!"

CHAPTER XV

"MY WIFE!"

OUTSIDE the hut liquor-crazed Voodoo worshipers danced and sang; the tom-toms beat savagely, while the old debbil doctor, in the center of the mob whose evil passions he was inciting, gyrated and chanted.

Inside, bound and helpless, half fainting with terror, Sylvia listened to the fiendish voice and to the shrill, animal-like cries of his followers. They were fast being brought into a state of hysteria. Helpless and at the mercy of these drunken savages!

And when the moon rose—her body shuddered from head to foot—she was to be dragged out and offered a living sacrifice to old Abel's devil gods! Hark! She shrank, tried to hide her eyes, to cover her ears, for a long, hideous yell sprang out, echoed by a hundred other voices.

"The moon! Dar de moon!"

Indeed, the east had brightened. She was trembling, desperate. A round, orange ball was swimming into the sky. She struggled frantically. But her bonds held. And then old Abel stood in the door of the hut, his evil face twisted with triumph.

"Voodoo is ready!" he cried, and stooped.

She tried to drag herself away from his clawlike hands, but she could not escape them. He had seized her, was pulling her from the pallet toward the door; the knife gleamed in his hands. Outside, the mob at sight of their victim went mad; Abel laughed and lifted his knife.

"You die that Voodoo may live!" he cried, and struck.

But his knife never reached its mark. There was the whine of a bullet. It took the old debbil doctor in the heart. He shrieked, leaped straight up into the air, and collapsed. The crowd whirled. Straight to the camp fire came Pierce Layton, his pistol in his hand. And before the awfulness of his face, the worshipers, bereft of their leader, fled like rats for their lives. Beside Sylvia her husband knelt, cut the cords that held her, lifted her into his arms.

"My dear, my beloved, my darling!" he cried brokenly.

She thought she was delirious again, that all the terror of this night had turned her head.

"But you—you hate me!" she whispered.

"No, no!" He crushed her to him as he had dreamed of doing. "I love you, I love you! I love you!"

Strength flowed back into her body at his touch; his kiss was like wine to her. And no longer could he doubt that she cared as her arms clung about him, her mouth burned beneath his.

"Do—do you love me, Sylvia?" he asked humbly. "Could you possibly after all I've done to you?"

"Yes, yes, I do, I do!" she said, and gave herself to his embrace.

It was a long time before he spoke anything but foolish, endearing words.

Then, "Tell me again," he whispered, "you forgive me."

But Sylvia had forgotten there was anything to forgive.

"I—I can't! Nice girls don't let sailors date them." "So that's it, is it?"

Navy Blues

By EVAN SANDS

"THE fleet's in!"

Aunt Mary stood in the wide, hospitable doorway and thus addressed her niece, who was swinging nonchalantly in the porch hammock. Peggy shrugged a smooth, brown-clad shoulder and displayed a dimple.

"What's that to me?"

"Nothing, honey—only better stay around the house."

"Or great big sailor man will snap up little girl? Funny old auntie, you know I'm not a sailor's lassie."

Auntie laughed.

Waterbury was a small, prosperous town built around a large, inviting harbor. Every few months one of the battleships would come in and then the streets would be thronged with sailors, and Aunt Mary's face would wear a troubled look. Of course, she knew that Peggy didn't go in for pick-ups, and that at least three Waterbury boys wore moon-calfy expressions because of her, but still some of the men off the ship *were* attractive—and Aunt Mary could still remember back to when she was a girl.

"Well, do be careful, dearie," she said now. "Some of them are a rough lot."

"But Peggy's one little girl who knows her onions, so just stop worrying your dear head about her."

When Peggy was six she had come to live with Aunt Mary and Uncle Joe, who had no children of their own, and

probably because they feared she might miss her dead parents' devotion they were doubly tender to her. Now, at nineteen, Peggy was one of the loveliest girls in Waterbury. For she did have the clearest brown eyes, the softest olive skin, the deepest dimple, and the whitest, straightest teeth of any girl in town—which was something. And she had, beside, a tinkling laugh that was so merry and happy that it went right to one's heart and started things there.

None of the girls in Peggy's set would be seen talking to a sailor. That was taboo. There were two kinds of girls in town—those who knew sailors and those who didn't. Still, there were times when one of the nicer girls would break loose, let a sailor date her, and receive a scolding at home and a host of questions from the other girls. There did seem to be something glamorous about it; maybe it was the attraction of forbidden fruit.

Peggy uncoiled herself, stood up to her full five feet two and said: "Think I'll take a walk, darling. Maybe I'll pick up Marion."

She slipped a jaunty little orange béret on her black curls, waved a slim hand to her aunt, who stood watching her admiringly, and tripped down the street.

AS Peggy passed along she looked, in her brown suit and her orange béret, like just another autumn leaf which had been swept off a tree. Very young and gay and adventurous.

Peggy was thinking. She was wondering whether she really preferred George to Herbie, or whether she had made the date with George to pique Herbie, or whether the man she really liked was Robin, who was away at college, and who wrote so regularly. They were three wonderful chaps, and she knew she was lucky, because so many girls didn't have even one beau. But somehow it was disappointing.

Like all girls, she wanted to be thrilled, and when Robin had kissed her good-by it had been no different from Aunt Mary's good night kiss, only she somehow preferred Aunt Mary's. Peggy wondered whether the fault was in herself. Surely one of the three boys ought to be able to make her heart skip a beat.

But, heart or no heart, thrill or no thrill, here was a glorious fall day, and Peggy set out to enjoy it. Twice she passed sailor boys, and each time she was addressed:

"Hello, sister, what's your hurry?"

"Oh, baby, where did you get those eyes?"

Peggy's little nose sniffed contemptuously and she drew herself up to, possibly, another half inch, but she was not at all perturbed. She walked briskly, and soon she came to Waterbury Park, which opened on the harbor. The park looked gala to-day, with its view of the big boat decorated with flags. It was all so lovely that Peggy felt a lump in her throat as she dropped down on a bench to watch it.

It must have been fate that made Peggy pull the mirror out of her purse, for as she did so her enameled powder case rolled out and down the road. In a moment she was on her knees searching for it. There it was! As she stretched out her hand to grasp it suddenly something very warm and brown and hard encircled her own hand, and she looked up into two of the merriest eyes she had ever seen.

"Allow me," said the young man gallantly, helping her to her feet, and handing her the small enameled box. Peggy began to laugh. It wasn't fair.

No man who heard her could resist it. The man laughed too. His blue eyes twinkled in his brown face, and a lock of his fair hair fell across his forehead in the most carelessly boyish fashion.

"I've been watching you for ten minutes," he said finally, "and you're pretty easy to watch. Did you drop the case to give me the chance I was looking for?"

All of a sudden Peggy realized that she was talking to a sailor.

For the first moment she hadn't thought of anything. Of anything, that is, except the funny, delicious, warm feeling that swept through her when the man swallowed up her small hand in his larger one. *That* had never happened to her before. And when she had looked into his blue eyes she had gone quite dizzy.

And he was a sailor, a "common sailor," she could hear Aunt Mary say, for all his kind face and his lovely, gallant manner.

"Thank you so much," Peggy's voice was cool and polite. "You're very kind, I'm sure."

"Kind?" The man laughed. "Why I thought girls like you were extinct. You're like a breeze on a stifling day, you know. You're—well, I guess you know you're pretty wonderful."

Peggy wondered what she should say. He didn't seem to be flirting. She felt infinitely drawn to him. But he was a sailor. She couldn't stand there talking to a sailor. Suppose some one she knew passed—Marion, or George, or Herbie? What would they think?

Two gobs passed. One of them called over, "Atta boy, Jack. You sure can pick 'em."

"Please—don't mind them. They're harmless really. Getting into port sort of goes to a feller's head."

There was something very thoroughbred and clean about him. Peggy thought she had never seen any one quite so—so—aristocratic would be a funny word to apply to a sailor, but it was the word she meant. He seemed almost knightly in his chivalry. And his eyes were very blue—quite the bluest eyes Peggy had ever seen.

"Do you live near here?" he asked.

"Why, yes, just a bit down the road—with my aunt and uncle."

"And have you a house with a porch?"

Peggy laughed. "A big porch and an open fireplace, and lots of books."

A hungry look came into the man's eyes and a wistful note crept into his voice as he said, "That sounds like home. Would you let me come some evening and sit on your porch?"

Would she let him come? Peggy's first impulse was to cry, "Yes, come. You'd just fit in with the books and the ship models and the big fireplace."

But then she thought of Aunt Mary. Could she bring this boy home—a sailor? Oh, she couldn't! Every one would know about it and think her cheap.

The red rose to her cheek and she began to stammer, "I—I—I can't do that. Nice girls don't."

A strange, hurt look swept over the man's face. "Nice girls don't let lonesome men come and sit on their porches?" he queried.

Peggy began to feel very miserable. She wanted to cry. "Not sailors," she muttered.

"Oh, so that's it, is it? Nice girls won't bother with sailors! Well, then, nice girl, you needn't. You can turn up your nose at every sailor you pass because you see him with some girl not your kind and then you can go home and say your prayers and feel

virtuous, and just forget that the reason he isn't with a nice woman, is because no nice woman will have him. He's a leper. He's too unclean even to sit on a nice girl's porch. *Nice girl!*" He was so angry that his voice shook. He turned on his heel suddenly, and strode quickly out of sight.

PEGGY wanted to cry, "Come back! Wait!" but her moving lips made no sound. She felt as if he had struck her. She could almost feel five livid welts across her cheek. She would never see him again. She had misjudged him utterly. She had been unkind. She, Peggy, had refused to allow a lonely man to sit on her porch and partake of her hospitality, not only a lonely man, but a handsome man, an attractive man, a man with the bluest eyes in the world.

The tears were in Peggy's eyes now. What should she have done? Brought him home and faced Aunt Mary's displeasure? Would Aunt Mary understand that this sailor was different—different from all other sailors, different, indeed, from all other men?

A passing boy sang out, "My future just passed!" and Peggy hastened her steps homeward.

She had no heart now for her date with George that evening. And she had looked forward to it. There was the new dress that she had planned to wear, dull green crêpe that Uncle Joe had given her for her birthday, and the jade earrings that had been Aunt Mary's gift. She had saved them for to-night. They were to go to the movies and after that to a road house to dance, but she didn't want to dance. She didn't want to go to the movies. She wanted to curl up into a miserable little ball in her bed and think about the blue eyes of the man she had hurt.

"What is it, puss?" Uncle Joe asked her that night.

"Nothing, darling," Peggy answered. "Why?"

"You seem tired."

Peggy smiled, and then wistfully she asked, "Uncle Joe, do you think all sailors are tough?"

"Well, well, Peggy, is it the Navy that's bothering you?"

Uncle Joe's big, kind hand mussed Peggy's black curls and his gray eyes lit up affectionately as he regarded her.

"Our little girl is certainly a heart-breaker, Mary," he said to auntie, but he never answered the question, for at that moment the doorbell rang, and a minute later George entered.

"Good evening, sir," George said politely. "Hello, auntie." (All the young men in town called Aunt Mary "auntie.") "Peggy, I have a surprise for you."

"What is it, George?" Peggy's interest was obviously half-hearted.

"Look out the window."

Peggy went to the window, drew the curtain, and then clapped her hands excitedly. "What a beauty! Where did you get it?"

The surprise was a stunning little coupé, brown and tan, and shinily new.

"Where do you think? From a doting parent. And it and I are ever and always at your service." George waved his felt hat with a flourish and bowed low. He was a nice boy and full of fun.

The dimple came back into Peggy's cheek and her black eyes flashed. It was going to be a pleasant evening after all. What did she care for the tall, fair sailor with the merry blue eyes that could look so wistful too. She was going to enjoy herself.

"Let's go," she cried. "I can't wait

to ride in it." And she picked up her dapper short fur jacket, slapped on her little green velvet turban, and was off.

THE movie was crowded. Sailor boys were everywhere in evidence. So that they needn't wait, George bought two seats in the loge. They were threading their way through the crowd, pushing genially and good-naturedly where they had to, when Peggy noticed a sailor standing with his back to her.

There was something vaguely familiar about the man's back. He was with another man, and there were two girls in the party, pretty, highly rouged girls—not awfully nice girls, Peggy thought. Then the man turned and she found herself face to face with her sailor of the afternoon.

She wanted terribly to make amends. She had been rude that afternoon and she was going to make up for it.

Peggy smiled her widest smile. Her eyes flashed and her dimple worked wonders in her smooth cheek. "Hello," she said eagerly.

But the sailor looked at her with no recognition. He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and, turning to the girl with him said, "True to the Navy. That seems to be the Waterbury slogan."

He had cut her.

Peggy's heart felt like a small lump of lead in her breast. She could feel strange pulses beating in her throat, and it was all she could do to keep back the tears.

"I—I thought I knew him," she stammered lamely to George, who seemed very displeased over the incident.

Of course, Peggy didn't enjoy the show. Indeed, she didn't even see it. There was a ringing in her ears and her head felt hot, and she told herself she was angry—angry—angry. She hated the sailor. She hated that red-haired, rouged girl he was with. Especially, she hated *her*. She hated her so much that she couldn't even follow the story on the screen, and twice when George spoke to her she didn't answer him.

Somehow the evening passed. But to Peggy it was an intolerably long evening. She didn't know how she managed to smile and say, "I had a lovely time" when finally it was over. But somehow she did.

In her room she threw herself on her bed and cried to her pillow, "Oh, the beast! How could he? How could he? I hate sailors! I hate them!" But all night she dreamed of a pair of blue eyes and the funny little shivers they sent through her.

The next morning Peggy decided to seek Marion and tell her about it. She was tired. She hadn't slept most of the night, and there were dark rings under the lovely black eyes. Ordinarily, Aunt Mary was her confidante. But how could she tell her this? She wanted sympathy, and Aunt Mary, she knew, would disapprove.

Marion listened interestedly, her face aglow.

"Oh, he does sound exciting, Peggy-kins! But I think he was pretty mean to pay you back like that." Marion lived on the secondhand thrills she received from Peggy's tales. She fairly worshiped her anyhow, and always had.

"Dear loyal Marion, but I did deserve it. Because he isn't just an ordinary person at all. Any one could see that—and I turned him down, and now—now—well, Marion, I guess that's that. I've just missed my chance. That's all."

"Oh, Peggy, I don't believe it. It certainly seems like fate that you met at all. You never go to Waterbury Park, do you? And you did that day.

"Compliments of the Navy," he murmured, withdrawing his arm. The next moment he was gone

And, anyhow, you met him again that night, and things always happen in threes. The third time is what counts. Just wait."

"Maybe," said Peggy ruefully, only half-comforted. "Anyhow, I haven't the heart to see Herbie to-night. I'm going to call it off, and if you want to, Marion, we can take a walk or something together."

"Of course," promised Marion.

MARION came over at eight. It was a raw evening, with the wind howling around corners. Not a pleasant evening for a walk. Peggy was restless, however, and she wanted to go out, so Marion loyally agreed.

Peggy would not have admitted, even to herself, that she was looking for her sailor, but somehow her foot-

steps headed for Waterbury Park, and soon the girls found themselves seated on the very bench where Peggy had had her adventure the day before. But this time nothing happened. There weren't many people out anyhow.

After a little while Peggy disconsolately suggested that they continue walking. As usual, Marion agreed.

"Let's try Front Street," said Peggy boldly.

"Oh, Peggy, not Front Street," demurred Marion.

Front Street was the water front of the town and, like most of its kind, not the kind of street to be used as a promenade by two pretty young girls. The toughest young men of the town made it their highway. Of course, when the fleet was in the sailors congregated there too.

Peggy insisted. "Why not! I'm through with silly prejudices. Oh, be a good sport, Marion."

Marion's desire to be a good sport was paramount, and soon the girls found themselves walking through the dark, narrow, evil-smelling street.

Peggy clutched Marion's hand and whispered, "Not awfully nice, is it?"

They had not walked far when they heard footsteps behind them. By this time Peggy was ready to turn back, but suddenly she was afraid of those footsteps. She didn't dare turn for fear of facing some ruffian. But it was too late. The footsteps were closing in on them, and a sudden sharp pain tore up Peggy's arm as she was twisted almost into the arms of a man, drunk, unshaven and bleary-eyed.

"Wosha hurry?" queried the man, tightening his clasp as Peggy tried to pull away. "Shut up you," as Marion, white and helpless, looked as if she were going to scream. "Wosha great big hurry?"

Peggy's small fist beat against the man's chest, and her voice would not come. He only leered at her and held her tighter. Just as Marion opened her mouth to emit a long, frightened howl something happened. The man lay sprawled out in the gutter, blood pouring from his nose.

For a moment Peggy thought it was Marion's shriek that had done it, but only for a split second, for she looked up and there were the two blue eyes, blazing angrily now, of her sailor boy.

"Are you hurt?" the low, pleasant voice asked concernedly.

"N-no, I'm all right."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that. Well," continued the young man, his eyes growing less blue and more impersonal with each word, "I hope the civilian gentleman was no friend of yours. I should hate to hurt any friend of yours. I would also advise you to leave this street at once." And, making a deep bow, he murmured, "Compliments of the Navy," and was gone.

For the third time in her life, Peggy felt that her face had been slapped.

That night she did not close her eyes. She kept thinking. Why had he run away? Why hadn't he at least allowed her to thank him? He had done more than save her life, and then he had left her feeling like a whipped child. She could not hate him now. Marion had said there would be three times. Well, that was the third time, and now she would never see him again.

And she was in love with him. There was no doubt in Peggy's mind this time. She might have wondered about George and Herbie and Robin, but about this man, whose name even she didn't know, she was sure.

It was no matter now what Aunt Mary thought. It was no matter what

George or Herbie or Robin or Marion might think. She was a sailor's sweetheart—and he didn't even know it. He probably thought she hated him and was glad that he had shamed her so.

THE next few days were unhappy ones for Peggy. She wouldn't see Herbie. She saw George once and quarreled with him. She walked daily in Waterbury Park, and all she ever got for it was wisecracks from the wrong sailor.

Two days later a very strange thing happened. A smart, square, white envelope, addressed to Miss Peggy Riddell, arrived by mail. The only letters Peggy ever received were Robin's, so Aunt Mary was quite excited when she saw the strange handwriting on the important-looking envelope.

"What is it, dear?" she asked her niece puzzledly. "Do open it right away."

Peggy let her unhappy eyes take in the handwriting, and with no great show of interest slit the envelope.

"Oh," she gasped, "it must be a mistake."

"What is it?"

"Look, auntie, it's an invitation from the Pentlodges. A dance to be given in honor of J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., on next Saturday night. But who is J. Brooks Roderick, Jr.? I'm sure I don't know him. And what can have happened to make Sally Pentlodge invite me to one of her parties? She hardly acknowledges me when she comes into Waterbury! I don't understand it at all."

The Pentlodges were the richest family for miles around. They were, indeed, so far ahead of their neighbors financially and socially that they had rather a lonesome life of it, and entertained only when some rich young blood or débutante chanced to visit them. On these occasions the most important people were invited from the various bordering counties, and the local newspapers carried full page reports of the festivities. Peggy had never before received an invitation to one of these parties.

"Joe, isn't it wonderful? Our Peggy is to go to a dance at the Pentlodges'. Who can tell what may come of it? Peggy, that should bring the sunshine back into your eyes. You *are* a lucky girl."

"But, Aunt Mary," Peggy remonstrated unhappily, "it must be a mistake. I don't want to go. I shan't know a soul there—and I'll feel like a poor relation. All the girls will have beautiful dresses and I'll be positively shabby. Oh, darling, don't think I'm ungrateful. I know you give me everything you possibly can—and more—but don't you see if I went to the dance, I'd just not belong."

"Indeed you will belong," Aunt Mary cried militantly. "And, what's more, you will be the loveliest girl there—and the best dressed, too. Anyhow, as well dressed as any of them. Now I know why I have been saving that beautiful real lace that was your mother's wedding dress. We will have Mrs. Smith in and she will put it together very simply. That lace is worth a fortune, and you'll look as aristocratic as any of them."

"Mary, how about that coral velvet wrap you saw in town—shall we buy it for her?" Uncle Joe was as eager as auntie that she should go.

So it was settled. Peggy was to go to the Pentlodge dance. Every one was excited. Such a thing had never happened to any girl in Peggy's set. She was a veritable Cinderella. Only Peggy didn't care. Indeed, she didn't want

to go. It would mean one walk less in Waterbury Park looking for her lost sailor. Maybe, just that night, he would be there.

SUCH a bustle and to-do as went on that week in the house. The seamstress was there sewing daily, for the lace could be handled only in the most delicate fashion, it was such fragile, cobwebby stuff. The coral wrap hung resplendently in Peggy's closet, waiting for the dance. On the shelf stood two tiny coral satin slippers with the daintiest of rhinestone buckles and the slimmest of high heels. A foamy chiffon and lace handkerchief lay folded between tissue paper in the drawer, waiting to be honored.

And Peggy walked daily in Waterbury Park and showed no great amount of interest in the proceedings.

Marion said to her, "It's like a story, Peggy. You know, the kind you read and just don't believe—and I'm so happy it's happened to you. I'm sure you'll meet some one wonderful—and rich—and may I come in the front way, Peggy, when you're Mrs. Van Astorbilt?"

"But, Marion, you don't know how scared I am. I shan't know what to say—and, anyhow, it's probably just a mistake and they'll wonder why on earth I came."

Nevertheless, the letter accepting the invitation was posted, and the days passed, and Peggy walked in vain in Waterbury Park, and Saturday came.

"Exquisite, I call it, exquisite," whispered Uncle Joe, and the tears came into his kind eyes. "Our little girl is a woman—and a beautiful one, Mary."

"Isn't she though?"

Peggy stood midway on the stairs leading into the living room, dressed for the party. Her gown was a success—distinctly so. It had an air of fragility that turned Peggy into a fairy. The coral velvet fell over her shoulders caressingly, and the pinkness of its color called out an answering flush in the smooth olive skin. Peggy's dark eyes were softer than the velvet and shone brighter than the little rhinestone buckles. She was beautiful.

George had offered to drive her to the Pentlodges'. He and Marion stood in the living room almost awe-struck at the apparition of Peggy on the stairs.

"Gosh!" was all either of them could say.

Now that the night of the party had come Peggy herself had caught the glow of excitement. When she examined her reflection in the glass her breath caught, and she thought, "Surely something lovely must happen to me to-night." She could not help realizing that she was beautiful. But she was frightened too. Would she be a success and, above all, what would she say? She didn't have a line.

In the car, George turned to her and said, "Peggy, you're so wonderful. You don't belong in a town like Waterbury. You were cut out to be a big town girl. I—I hope one of those millionaires fall in love with you to-night. But if one does, I don't think I'd know how to live—without you, Peggy."

"Dear George," whispered Peggy, "it's nice of you to say that, but it's not a millionaire I want, George, at all."

"What would he have to be?" asked George, eager to take advantage of the opening.

Peggy thought, "A sailor with blue eyes." She said, "Naughty, don't get so inquisitive."

Arrived at the great stately house, Peggy whispered, "Good-by," and with beating heart walked up the wide steps and into the softly lighted, spacious foyer.

When she came downstairs after leaving her wrap she sought the reception hall, where Sally Pentlodge, tall, slim and artistic, wrapped the folds of silky scarf tighter about her bare shoulders and greeted her.

"Good evening, Miss Riddell. I'm so glad you could come. It's so nice to have you, especially since you know our guest. He especially asked that you be invited, you know," she added, by way of explanation.

ALL of Peggy's well thought-out sentences left her brain at that statement. And while she stood there stammering her hostess continued, "Here is your table card, and here is Mr. Nutley, who will be your dinner partner. I'm sure he will be happy to take care of you."

A short, stoutish young man bowed over Peggy's hand and said, not ungallantly, "I guess this is my lucky evening, Miss Riddell."

"Mine too," murmured Peggy politely, wondering what it was all about, but taking the proffered arm and allowing herself to be led into the ballroom. She knew no J. Brooks Roderick, Jr. It *was* a mistake, after all. What should she do? Almost, she was an uninvited guest. An uninvited guest at a Pentlodge dance! Impossible situation!

"Mr. Nutley," she asked after a moment, "who is J. Brooks Roderick, Jr.?"

Mr. Nutley laughed. "Come, come," he said. "That's very clever of you, pretending not to know who J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., is. Why, he's the son and heir of J. Brooks Roderick, of course."

A few moments later Peggy inquired, "Mr. Nutley, who is J. Brooks Roderick?"

Mr. Nutley's honest face wore a puzzled expression. "My dear child, if you are being conversational, then I must ask you in turn who is J. Pierpont Morgan, who is Vincent Astor, who is—well, anybody like that? J. Brooks Roderick of Connecticut, of course—steel Roderick, you know."

"Oh," said Peggy, feeling queerer and queerer.

At that moment she heard music—a march—the dinner march. She was suddenly aware of many people, gay, laughing, lovely. Girls dressed in brilliant reds, soft mauves, gay yellows. She was aware of the soft swishing of silk, the air was alive with delicate perfumes, her eyes almost hurt at the sparkle of gems. It was wonderful. Peggy decided to forget the mystery and enjoy it all. On Mr. Nutley's well padded arm she glided into the dining room.

"Right here, Miss Riddell, with lucky me on your left and lucky Mr. Averill on your right," Mr. Nutley said, introducing her to Mr. Averill, who seemed eager to be introduced.

Mr. Averill quickly entered into conversation with Peggy, holding her attention for some five minutes. By that time every one was seated and suddenly Mr. Nutley nudged Peggy and said, "There, my dear, is J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., Jack Roderick to his friends."

Peggy's glance swept the length of the table and rested on the guest of honor.

Impossible coincidence! The color left her face, the foamy lace and chiffon handkerchief was twisted into

a tight ball in her palm, the pulses she had discovered in her throat started to beat. There at the head of the table, faultlessly, immaculately clad in evening clothes, sat her mysterious sailor! As their eyes met he nodded faintly,

"Very well, then, since you compel me." He bent his face to her tear-stained one and kissed her and kissed her

and then turned to Miss Pentlodge, who was his dinner partner.

"What is the trouble?" asked Mr. Nutley, who was watching her attentively.

"Nothing—nothing at all." Peggy looked again and then decided she must have gone crazy. It was just a resemblance, that was all. She had often heard of doubles. "Nothing at all, Mr. Nutley, only—you'll think it's awfully funny, I'm sure—but I once saw a sailor who looked just like Mr. Roderick."

"How clever of you, my dear, ha, ha! How clever. You know, Miss Riddell, I always thought it rather hard of old Steel Roderick to let his son stay in the Navy, just because he joined it for a schoolboy prank. That's why they called him 'Steel Roderick' I suppose. He's as hard as the metal. But Jack'll be getting out in a few weeks, and it's done him good, too."

Peggy's head began to spin. Round and round and round. J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., sailor boy, one. He had asked that she be invited. But why, why? Perhaps he did love her too. Only, if he weren't just a sailor, what chance would she have with him, the son of millionaire Steel Roderick? Oh, how she wished now he was just a sailor again!

She could not wait for the dancing to start. Then he would be able to tell her why he had done it. He would take her in his arms and it would be heavenly to feel his nearness, to glide with him over the smooth floor. She would be very humble and apologetic and sweet. He would see. Meanwhile, she managed to keep up two conversations, one with each of the gentlemen beside her, who seemed charmed with her lovely freshness.

THE dinner passed. The guests returned to the ballroom, well fed, gay, spirited. The music started. Mr. Nutley claimed the first dance. Mr. Averill claimed the second. She danced with the two men, but her eyes sought Jack Roderick. Where was he?

First he danced with Sally Pentlodge. How beautifully he danced. Then he was dancing with Cynthia, Sally's lovely cousin. Surely, now he would ask her. But no—he was already on the floor with a blond woman, and Peggy found herself spinning around with a tall, talkative stranger. The fourth dance and still he did not seek her. Mr. Nutley returned to claim her. What was it all about? Why didn't he speak to her if he had gone to the trouble of asking Sally Pentlodge to invite her?

The music for the fifth dance had started when she saw his tall figure edging in her direction. She sat still and waited. At last! And then, "My dance," she heard his well-remembered voice saying to the girl nearest her. Her eyes met his and he smiled at her triumphantly.

So that was it. He was paying her back! Peggy's eyes snapped back the tears that welled up. He had invited her there to make a fool of her, to show her that he didn't care a snap of his fingers for her or her hospitality, that he could show her hospitality a thousand times more important.

"I'm awfully warm, Mr. Nutley. I think I'll go into the garden," she gasped.

"Of course, of course, by all means," said Mr. Nutley, taking her arm and escorting her out of the room.

The garden was beautiful. It was hung with hundreds of silk lanterns, gold and green, and a colored light played on the fountain, changing it from pale lavender shades to deep orangy-rose, until it seemed like liquid flame.

Peggy, however, was not interested in the garden, or the lanterns, or the fascinating fountain. She only wanted to get away where she could cry without being seen. She didn't want to make a fool of herself.

"Mr. Nutley, you're so kind and I'm so thirsty. Could I ask you to bring me a drink?"

"Of course, of course," answered kind Mr. Nutley. "What will you have?"

"Oh, anything, anything at all, just so long as it's cold—and—and wet," begged Peggy. "I'll wait for you right here by the fountain."

Mr. Nutley bowed his bald head, turned his plump little body and disappeared around the path toward the

house. As soon as he had gone, Peggy picked up her lacy, billowy skirts and fled in the opposite direction. Up the path she went until she got out of sight of the fountain and the lanterns, and then she sank on a large rock under a weeping willow tree.

"Now," she thought, "I can cry and get it over with. And then I'll go back and find Mr. Nutley and go home. Oh, how unhappy I am."

And she did cry. First she cried silently—and then, as the sobs gathered, she made little sounds, and then she found she couldn't stop at all, she was so unhappy.

Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder and thought, "It's Mr. Nutley. He's found me. I have made a fool of myself. And I don't care."

As the grasp on her shoulder tightened she felt a need for words and she cried out, "Oh, Mr. Nutley, I'm so unhappy. I never should have come. I don't belong here anyway."

AND then something very strange happened. She was swept up into the arms of a man and a low, familiar voice was saying, "You poor darling. You do belong. Forever and ever. Can you forgive me? I didn't mean to make it so hard for you."

Peggy's tear-stained face looked up into the blue eyes of J. Brooks Roderick. They were very tender eyes now, regretful and ashamed.

"You!" she gasped, and she tried to break from his hold and run.

"No, you don't," said J. Brooks Roderick, Jack to his friends.

"Oh, you beast, you beast," sobbed Peggy. "You invited me here just to humiliate me. You wanted to make a fool of me, didn't you? Well you have, and I hope you're satisfied. But I hate you, I hate you, I—"

"Peggy, dear, listen to me, please. I didn't want to humiliate you. I wanted to teach you a little lesson in hospitality and to show you that you mustn't generalize. That was all. But, honestly, I didn't want to make you unhappy. And I'm genuinely sorry. Won't you believe me?"

"I don't care. I don't want to listen," Peggy sobbed.

"Very well, then, since you compel me." Jack tilted the quivering chin upward and planted a long, sweet kiss on the trembling lips. Then his arms closed tightly about her slight body, and he kissed her and kissed her.

Strange, terrible things were happening to Peggy. She had dreamed of being made love to thus, but never had she experienced anything so sweet as Jack's kisses. Before she realized what she was doing, her arms slipped around his neck and she was returning kiss for kiss.

"There," said Jack suddenly, "I knew it."

"What?" whispered Peggy breathlessly.

"That you do care for me."

Peggy's mouth clamped indignantly.

"As I love you, darling Peggy," continued Jack, taking her in his arms again. "Don't you realize it, sweet? Do you think I would have gone to the trouble of giving this party if I hadn't wanted you? For it isn't Sally's party at all—it's mine—she simply gave it because I asked her to. And it was all to be able to meet you as you wanted to be met."

"Oh," gasped Peggy, "you make me so ashamed. And I thought you were a sailor."

"I am, darling, for five more weeks. But after that I am J. Brooks Roderick at my lady's command. Sweet, tell me you did want to know me."

"Oh, Jack, I did, truly! I walked every day in Waterbury Park hoping I'd meet you and could apologize for that first day."

"I know."

"You know?"

"Certainly. I saw you there. Only I managed to walk behind you."

"Jack!" cried Peggy indignantly.

"Peggy," laughed Jack, kissing her, "dear, dear little Peggy. I shall not walk behind you again. We shall walk together side by side—from now on. Say we shall."

Peggy's lovely face was puzzled.

"I'm proposing, Peggy," he said finally.

"I believe you are laughing at me," stammered Peggy, a little bit afraid of her man.

"Indeed, I'm not. I never in my life was as sincere as I am this moment. Peggy, say you will marry me. You've just got to because I fell in love with you the moment I saw you in Waterbury Park—and you can't condemn me to four more years of service looking for a girl to love."

Peggy looked into the blue eyes and decided that he did mean it—every word.

"Oh, Jack, I do want to say 'yes.' I've been wretched since that day you cut me in the movies. I do care. But what will your father say? I'm not an heiress or a society girl. I'm just plain Peggy Riddell and you'll probably be disinherited or something."

"Is it my money you're after?" laughed Jack.

"You know it's not," Peggy cried. "I'd rather have you plain sailor Jack this minute, and you know it. I'm afraid of your father and your swell friends and your relatives—and if I didn't love you so much I'd tell you to go to—"

"You darling!" Jack's arms closed about her and he kissed her passionately. "Don't you think father's a good judge of people? That's how he made his millions. He never passed up a good man nor picked a bad one. And I guess I've inherited his judgment, because the moment I saw you I knew you were a girl in a million. You're generalizing again, sweet. All rich fathers disinherit their sons for marrying the right girl, just as all sailors are common! I see. I shall have to teach you a lot of things. Come now, tell me, could you marry me if I were just a poor sailor?"

"Could I, Jack? Oh, darling, I've had the Navy blues since I met you. I thought the one man in the world for me had come and gone."

"Then you can marry me if I'm J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., because he's as good as a poor sailor any day."

Peggy's black eyes glowed like stars in the dark. She slipped her lovely white arms around the neck of the tall man and held up her chin. He understood, and their lips met in a long, sweet kiss.

"Darling, darling," Peggy whispered finally, "I may be the wife of J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., but I'll always, always be just a sailor's sweetheart!"

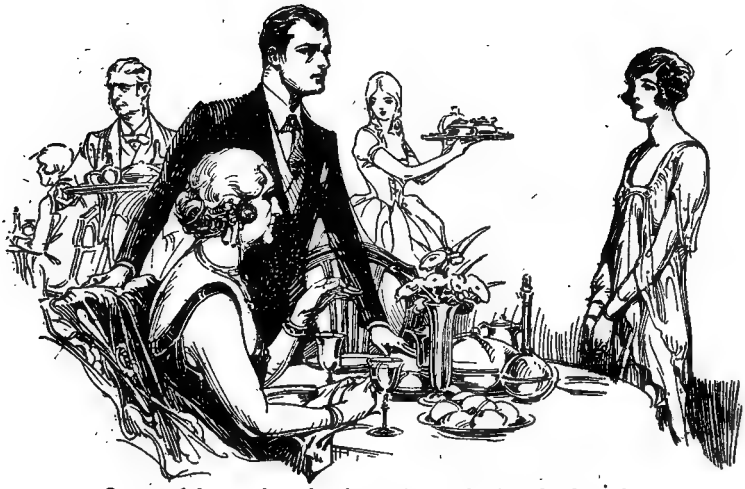
"Right-o," answered J. Brooks Roderick, Jr., and his blue eyes sparkled happily.

"But, Jack," whispered Peggy, "how did you ever know who I was?"

"Easy, darling, easy," confessed Jack, "just two dollars of the Roderick fortune for a report from a smart little Waterbury newsboy—and a glance through the directory."

Peggy laughed her gay laugh.

"And now Mrs. Peggy J. Brooks Roderick, Jr. to be, may I have the next dance?"



On one of those enchanted nights in Austria the three dined together

An Offer of Marriage

By BERTA RUCK

FRANKIE CARTER, who lives on Long Island and works in a New York Beauty Shoppe, becomes acquainted on the train with a young man named Robert Sevening. She takes him for an everyday commuter, whereas he really is a multimillionaire, owning the Shoppe where she works and a chain of others.

One morning when they come in to Penn Station together he is arrested and taken to jail before her eyes. All that day, Frankie, who is beginning to be very much in love, worries over Mr. Sevening's plight. One of the clients invites her on a theater party that same night, and there he appears, but makes no explanation. He tells Frankie he is going abroad, to Vienna, via London, and promises to see her when he returns.

Then one day when she goes home from work, the girl hears great news: an old aunt of her mother's has just died and left Frankie a substantial sum of money, but there is a condition . . . She bursts out with, "What condition? *Mustn't I ever get married?*"

CHAPTER VI

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

EVEN as the quick words broke from her her thoughts were racing ahead. "If I'm not to take the money unless I'll never marry, well, I won't be an heiress!"

But at her words every one in the room had broken into laughter.

"What's the joke?" Frankie demanded, holding her gold head high.

Swiftly Mrs. Carter replied, "Darling Frankie, of course you can get married! To anybody you want! Whenever you like! It isn't *that*—"

Frankie, hoping wildly that she only *felt* as though she was blushing scarlet, retorted, "Well, let's have what it is. Dad, what is the darned old condition?"

"That you sign an agreement, never again to touch wine or spirits."

"Is *that* all? Oh, people! Is that *all?*"

"This, my dear, is what happened," Mr. Carter was saying. "Her lawyers told me about it to-day. Only a week ago the old lady had been reading some paper about the Modern Girl and the Cocktail Habit. You know, just one of these scare articles. Well, the old lady was appalled. She thought of you, Frankie."

"Ah, she's been hearing things," put in George, shaking a shiny head. "She's heard how young Frankie had been dragged into this gin-tippling set. No more of that for you, my girl!"

"Your aunt considered you a nice girl, Frankie. Worth saving, she told her lawyers. She determined she would snatch you as a brand from the burning, and this was the way to do it—leave you money, but put a taboo on liquor."

"Think you can stand it, Frankie?"

"What, for the sake of all that money? Great Snakes and Ladders, I'd agree to leave off make-up for the rest of my life!"

"I'd go without chocolates; I'd go without sugar in my tea," declared Win, the family sweet tooth. "I'd go without tea for my sugar!"

"Poor dear old Aunt Anna," they sighed together. "If only it had been conveyed to her how little hold the dreaded cocktail habit had on the Carter girls!"

"But what a mercy it wasn't!"

"AND what is Frankie going to do with all that money?"

This discussion was served with the tomato soup; it went round with the fish; it was sauce to the cold joint of the Carters' supper—to which there had dropped in Win's fiancé, Ronald, a bank clerk.

The blameless Ronald was plain featured, the sort of young man who appealed to all the mother instincts of Winifred; the rest of the family classifying him in the phrase, "Well, *we* haven't got to marry him," at which it may go. With the rest he plunged into the discussion.

"Of course," he said, "you might try to make it more at once; a little shop, say, or—"

"Nothing of that sort here." This firmly from Frankie's trustee. "Frankie's going to hang on to her steady income."

"Sixty a week," said Win, on a deep breath, "when you add it on to her salary!"

"Salary—?"

This gave another turn to the conversation. Mrs. Carter objected that now that Frankie had come in for all that money surely she wouldn't have to work?

Again laughter rippled round the cheaply set, dainty table. Again Mum was bidden remember in what year we live; how self-respecting girls want their own jobs the same as self-respecting boys. *Anyhow* till they got married!

"And why not after?" demanded

Win, who well knew she could never marry her Ronald unless she could keep herself.

Mum, however, protested that she always had hated the idea of that horrid morning train or bus for girls in all weathers, with nobody to see what they had for lunch, when all the time they might be comfortably taken care of at home—

"What doing? Running up curtains for George's room?" suggested Frankie with a sniff. "And popping over to the laundry to speak to them about George's dress shirts?"

"Well, but darling, isn't that a more normal life—"

(By "normal," every woman means the life that comes naturally to herself.)

"So much more *natural* than attending to those *horrid* Beauty people. I," Mum announced, "would like to see Frankie give notice to-night!"

"Not I. Not this week of all weeks."

Instant chorus of, "Why not?"

Again Frankie's little gilt head went up.

"Because it never rains but it pours; because this week I've got the offer of extra work which is to be made well worth my while."

Mr. Carter asked quietly, "What's all this about extra work? Where?"

Like many otherwise enlightened American families, the Carters retained the belief that "Paris" and "Vienna" are synonymous with all sorts of dangers and depravity. Also, they could not suffer any member to depart from their midst without a litany of pros and cons. The Noes seemed to have it. Not only Frankie's parents, but her brothers and sister seemed to find it impossible not to try to put a spoke in Frankie's wheel.

"A batty idea!" George called it. "Going and dancing attendance on a mad dowager—"

"When you might be enjoying yourself, going to any show you wanted to see, *dashing* over to Europe!"

"There's no reason why I shouldn't!" Frankie protested. "I don't know why you all seem to think you must go on like this about it."

They went on. Any daughter of a large, affectionate family, who has ever wanted to take an unexpected trip, will know exactly how, and for how long, the Carters "went *on*."

Frankie, however, had made up her mind.

She was *going*.

Against the heavy shower of discouragement she put up determination as stout as the stoutest old-fashioned umbrella.

Before the front door was bolted for the night she had approached—and had persuaded!—her father to advance to her, on account of her coming fortune, the sum of fifty dollars.

"For decent shoes and gloves and a new hat and a small suitcase. I must have those," she explained, undaunted. "You see, dad, at the end of this week I have to be off! Oh, dad, *do* 'rejoice with them that do rejoice!' I *am* so looking forward to—to the journey!"

THIS journey, from the start, meant *surprise*.

Once arrived in Europe, they were to take it in easy stages. In Paris Mrs. Griggs would wait to have her first fitting for a coat Evangeline had had designed for her; she would visit her special *parfumerie* and pick up some of her own specially blended scent. She would perhaps see this play at the Michodière which everybody said was so excellent. They

would put up for the night at her usual suite at the Ritz—

The Ritz. "I," thought Frankie, "shall feel like one of Cytherea's clients, instead of the receptionist!"

"—Next day on to Zurich. Then Zurich to Munich. A day to look at pictures in Munich." And then Munich to Vienna, where Venus, Mme. Griggs's colored maid, would be already unpacked and waiting at the hotel.

"Will Mme. Griggs be traveling by express?"

"Oh, no! She'll want to save time. These trains are too slow for us. You and she are to fly."

A brief silence.

"To *fly?*"

"Yes." Beautiful Evangeline took it as a matter of course. She raised her penciled eyebrows at this girl—with whom, to make final arrangements, she was lunching at White's. "You've never flown, Miss Carter?"

"I? Never thought I'd have an earthly chance to! *Oh,* Mrs. Griggs! When I've seen the plane in the Penn Station with the big gold letters on it it's looked to me like a picture out of some wild fairy tale or an impossible dream—"

"That's coming true now, then. How amazed you look, child!"

"Because you talk as if it were nothing."

"Why, I suppose I do. I'm so accustomed to it," she returned with her detached smile. "You must not ask me to be terribly thrilled."

"I see; but—but please don't ask me *not* to be terribly thrilled?"

"Your first time to cross the ocean, or to fly? Why, I'd hate to think you *wouldn't* react! I wish I were going for the first time. I wish I could remember my first time at anything."

She thought, "This child has some happy Secret with which she travels; wherever she goes, *she takes it with her.*"

CHAPTER VII

SAY IT WITH ORCHIDS

A MASCULINE voice behind Frankie exclaimed: "Why, see who's here!"

"Here," was the hall of the Ritz in Paris.

In this palace of gilded architecture, soft rosy carpetry, and mirror-glass reflecting more architecture, carpetry, and mirror-glass, Mme. Griggs was well known.

At the entrance of that modish figure, which—from the back—might have been a widow of thirty-eight, there clustered to her deferential Frenchmen, bowing, beaming, greeting, inquiring. Frankie stood glancing about impressed; bewildered by the French chatter.

Suddenly she caught that delighted voice.

"Why, see who's here! If it isn't Mme. Griggs! Look, you boys!"

"*Grandfather,*" protested a younger voice. "Evangeline and Mme. Griggs weren't to be in Europe this year! That's some other American lady. It's embarrassing the way Grandfather keeps seeing likenesses. *Positively* embarrassing!"

Frankie turned—to confront three men—one old, two quite young.

"Mme. Griggs! There are some gentlemen here who seem to know—"

Madame whisked about, to become the center of delighted recognition, triumph and exclamations from this trio.

"See what happens when a woman thinks she has Paris to herself! Miss

Carter, my child, I want you to meet my very oldest friend, Mr. Richard P. Alden, from Virginia."

"Miss Carter," returned Grandfather—a handsome old man with shocks of silver hair, a square, rosy face, and a figure still sturdy but rather globular—bowing low, "I am more than pleased to meet you."

"And these are Mr. Rupert Alden and Mr. Wilfred Alden."

"You boys—" were decorative young fellows with shining brown hair, bronzed faces, and figures broad-shouldered and lean.

"I thought, Richard," added Mme. Griggs, with a smile that still coquetted with the old admirer, "that your traveling days were done?"

"Why, Catherine, I thought they were. But last time I got back home and found all the other old men at the club sitting round in the same old chairs, telling the same old stories about the same old complaints, I felt that maybe there were other aspects of life upon this planet I'd rather investigate. So here I am! And isn't this fine, meeting you and Miss Carter?" ("As if he were *my* oldest friend, too!" thought Frankie.) "What a wonderful time we'll all have together in Paris, won't we, you boys?"

"We surely will!"

And that very day, at tea, surrounded by every attention from the two personable young men, the object of admiration and respect, she thought:

"I wish that everybody at *home* could see this, all this fuss, and the importance of whether I like China or Indian, and being told there's nobody at the Ritz that can touch us two ladies. Feminine society seems to be such a *treat* to these people! They're probably as polite as this to any girl just because she *is* a girl?"

Why could not Frankie have applied this philosophy to Robert Sevening and *his* attentions? Alas! Because she had fallen in love with him she made far too much of his natural courtesy. Now she was making too little of the attraction, genuine and thriving, which might be seen in the eyes of another man.

FRANKIE was unprepared, when she came down from the lordly suite in which she had been unpacking, to meet, from Grandfather, such outspoken compliments on her appearance in "that sweet gown." This was her unassuming morsel of yellow-and-cream chiffon, bought at a sale. She was unprepared, too, for the offering from Rupert Alden of a spray of recklessly expensive mauve orchids.

"For me?" Obviously for her; a twin spray had already been presented by Grandfather to Mme. Griggs, who was fastening it with a diamond bar to her black velvet Chanel dinner gown. "*Frightfully* sweet of you—"

From Sevening, the girl in love would have exaggerated every expression of admiration, translating it into what she wished it to mean. But she did *not* at once conclude that this polite young Mr. Alden must have "fallen" for her—heavily.

Yet the truth was he had, from the word "Go," found this sunshine-blond most intriguing. She possessed for Rupert the charm which makes it *so much easier to fall in love when* one is away from home. By the charm of a little business girl he was becoming fascinated; and he said so—with orchids.

"I'd be honored if you'd wear them to-night, Miss Carter. But it was stupid of me not to inquire into colors: these mauvy things don't harmonize with

that pretty frock of yours. I'll send a bellhop to carry these up to your room. Pardon me a moment—"

He slipped away from their party. Miraculously quickly he returned, without the mauve orchids, but with a posy of creamy fragrant rosebuds, set in a circle of golden pansies.

"I believe this'll be more the color, if you'd care to wear them? I had the flower woman find me a pin."

Frankie hardly knew what to say.

They dined together at the best table in the Ritz restaurant; and she felt as if incense were being swung before Mme. Griggs and herself.

Grandfather took command of the waiters, with the air of the host who is accustomed to order the best of everything and to get it.

"Champagne. Yes, Clicquot with the yellow label. Can Miss Carter drink Clicquot with the yellow label? What, no Clicquot, no label, no wine? Well, well!"

No time for Frankie to explain why her young life was thus swayed by prohibition. Rupert murmured something about its being a novelty.

Everybody was talking, vivacious.

"Old Mme. Griggs is fairly blossoming out," noted Frankie.

"Miss Carter, I make no secret of my life-long devotion to our wonderful friend," Grandfather was saying. "You may take it from me the very first time I met her, a beautiful young girl of sixteen in a flouncy frock of dotted Swiss with a pale-blue sash, I made her an offer of marriage."

"There would be more cause for your bragging about it, Richard," retorted Mme. Griggs, with an amazingly coquettish little smile, "if I had happened to accept you!"

"My pride, Catherine, is for the good taste I displayed."

"What's the matter with *our* taste?" hazarded Rupert, turning upon the girl a glance which, had it come from Mr. Robert Sevening, would have blinded Frankie.

"Luck in love isn't always the reward of taste in ladies," pronounced Grandfather. "Will you believe me, Miss Carter, that the Heart of Stone sitting opposite to you refused me six times?"

"Five only. Now, Richard! Play fair!" Mme. Griggs shook her hennaed head at him until her diamond earrings flashed like searchlights. A tinge of envy clouded the interested Frankie. These two talked of offers of marriage as though every girl were as sure to have them as she was to possess a compact?

Yet among the girls she knew—even the prettiest and the most popular—"an offer" remained an event, an epoch-maker! This elderly matron took it as a matter of course that Grandfather—who was even yet attractive—had proposed to her five times—and exclaimed: "*Only* five."

"The sixth, Catherine, is being put to you right now," declared the handsome old man, with a hand to his piqué waistcoat. All laughed gayly; and Mme. Griggs declared that of all compliments the sweetest was a proposal handed to a woman in public.

Before she knew what she was going to say, Frankie burst out with: "Do you know, I'm nineteen, and I have *never yet* had a single offer of marriage?"

"MISS CARTER, I hope you ladies are arranging to stay in Paris for a good long time?" This was from Rupert Alden as he settled himself into the stall next to Frankie at the Théâtre Michodière.

"What, just for this one night? Impossible? Off again by air *tomorrow?* Now, where? Germany, Austria; Vienna? Now, why?"

"Now *what,*" asked Grandfather indignantly, "might you be going to do in Vienna, Catherine?"

"Curosity, thy name is Richard Alden!"

Frankie thought: "She won't talk to *him* about rejuvenation treatments—"

"Something that can't be postponed? Stay on just a week, Catherine. Give me and these boys the chance of taking you and Miss Carter around Paris! Rupert's got his car. Let's have a *gorgeous* four or five days?"

"Oh, no," thought Frankie in affright. "*Not* a week! It was only for a week that Mr. Sevening was to be in Vienna!"

She was too horrified to notice the look in the steady gray eyes of Rupert Alden, for whom also a good deal seemed dependent upon Mme. Griggs's answer.

Gently imperious, the lady declared —that, delightful as it was to be invited, her plans were all made—

Frankie breathed again.

"A woman's motto should be," added Mme. Griggs gayly, "*Go—while you're sparkling!*"

At the end of the second act—"I've seen enough of this! Now, if I were with Evangeline I shouldn't dare to move," said Evangeline's mother. "I'd *have* to sit out the rest of the piece. But as she's not here I'll go back to the hotel and get my beauty sleep . . . Miss Carter! I don't ask a girl of nineteen to do anything so unnatural as to come over to Paris and then go to bed at her usual time. Mr. Alden will see me home. You go right along, honey, and dance somewhere with the boys—"

Thanks to some arrangement best understood by brothers, it was with one only of the boys that Frankie went on to dance. Somehow young Wilfred Alden's straight-backed figure disappeared. Frankie sat in Rupert's car while he drove Montmartreward through the deserted streets.

"Where are we going, Mr. Alden?"

"I am trying to go to some place a friend of mine told me about; the Gyroscope. He said there was a corking good band and floor and was the kind of place where you could take any lady, so I thought—Miss Carter, this evening means a whole lot to me," said Rupert, turning bright sincere eyes from the wheel to the girl beside him. "Meeting you! Going to take *you* out to dance! Tell me something, will you?"

"What?"

"Were you serious, that time at dinner? I mean — when you said you—" He hesitated. "You're nineteen—"

"Of course! I shan't be twenty till July."

"I mean when you said you hadn't had any men make you an offer of marriage?"

"I oughtn't to have blurted it out like that," Frankie admitted, her ears turning pink in the darkness. "Girls are such bores to inflict their life history on strangers. Only, it seemed to burst out of me. So many things *do,* when I'm feeling cheerful, but they're always quite true. Too true."

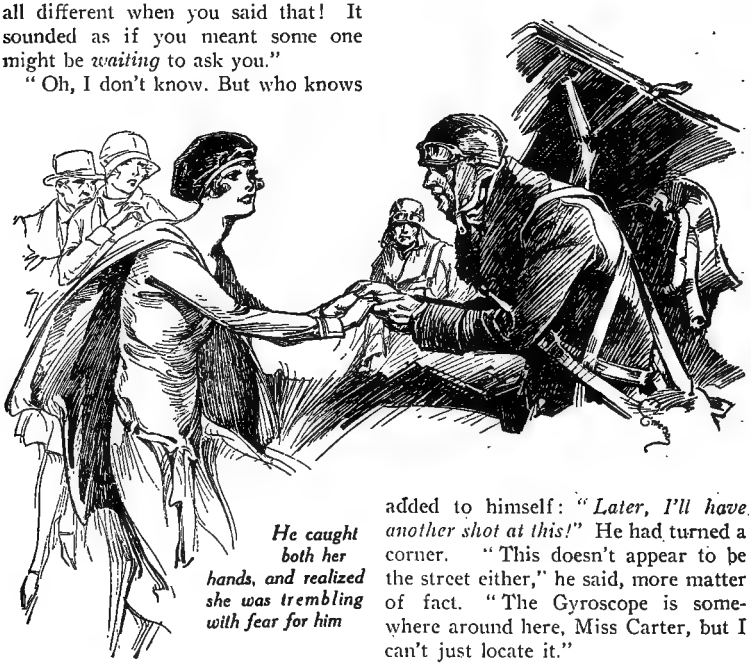
"Nobody believed this one, I assure you," said the young man. "We'd refuse to think the men you know are blind. Anyway, it shan't be said another minute. Perhaps you think I'm crazy, but Grandfather proposed to Mme. Griggs the first time he saw her, so—"

He was speaking as rapidly as he drove; even more rapidly little Frankie broke in:

"I don't think I'd have liked anybody to—to propose to me the very first time!"

"Miss Carter! Your voice sounded all different when you said that! It sounded as if you meant some one might be *waiting* to ask you."

"Oh, I don't know. But who knows



He caught both her hands, and realized she was trembling with fear for him

what may be waiting round any corner?" laughed Frankie, suddenly gay with the consciousness of being admired—even if it is by the wrong man. She knew, now. She, who had been deaf and blind to the sudden "fall" of this chivalrous youngster, was awake to it now. But he mustn't say it, she determined. Hope nestled at the heart of her wish dream, a glowworm hidden in petals of a rose. The right man would appear, and—oh, presently there would be the right offer! It was that moment which she did not mean to spoil.

Almost as if he read her thoughts, "I understand," said the young man steadily. There was a gleam of determination on his comely face as if he added to himself: "*Later, I'll have another shot at this!*" He had turned a corner. "This doesn't appear to be the street either," he said, more matter of fact. "The Gyroscope is somewhere around here, Miss Carter, but I can't just locate it."

"Hadn't you better ask somebody?"

"I've no luck asking round this burg—Ah!" He pulled up. "Music! Lights!" He got out. "This is it, I guess."

He was wrong.

"HOW was I to know?" Rupert Alden asked his brother later. "These confounded places all look alike from the outside. How was I to tell we'd got to the Bilitis Bar,

where you wouldn't take any girl you thought much of? It was an *awful* place—"

Only a glimpse had Frankie into the little cave, yet it showed her a jazz of details: walls, crudely daubed with frescoes; over-made-up girls in bérets and blazers; expensively turned out dowagers, with dopey eyes huddled over a table with a champagne bucket, whispering, giggling, glancing; weak-looking youths with strange cravats; frilly, limp girls who danced with other girls wearing tailored coats and shirts, low-heeled shoes, hair vehemently brilliantined, and a brazen stare.

A glimpse of the exhibition dancer; a small, swarthy-skinned Oriental, wearing silver pectorals and a swirling skirt, and jingling a tamborine. There was a babel of voices in the three languages of Paris, of shattering saxophone music, tuneless, metallic, and the loud barking of a client's dog at another dog. Over all rose the thick sultry atmosphere of alcohol, unfresh clothing, tobacco, heated human bodies, costly but stale perfume, bygone meals, and grime of every sort. In one moment the place was hidden from Frankie by the winglike shoulders of Rupert the American, who was saying firmly, "We'll get right out of this; you don't have to see this dive, Miss Carter."

Driving her back to the Ritz he said so ruefully that he was sorry that Frankie laughed.

"I'm not a baby, Mr. Alden. Why was it so fearful?"

"Largely," he told her, "because a place like that makes believe to be wild and lurid."

He was silent a moment then went on: "I hate to think what folks can do to earn their keep, Miss Carter. One of those girls—the one in the gray tailored suit with the amber cigarette holder, I've seen her before—she's an art student. A girl from back home. She'd no business to be there! Hiking over the foothills with a brace of fox terriers, that's what she ought to be doing, with some nice fellow who was looking after her for life. Just terrible to think of her in that fake dive. That's all there was to it. A repulsive, shoddy, faked dive."

More and more Frankie liked him; liked everything, from his wholesome repulsion from the Bilitis Bar to the touch of the firm hand that helped her out of his car.

"Any girl would be lucky who had him to 'look after her for life,'" Frankie thought. "And he might have asked me—*imagine* it!"

Who knows? If Mme. Griggs had remained in Paris, or if Rupert had come on with them in their wanderings, might not Frankie shortly have been that girl?

"Mr. Sevening behaves more like one's brother than the Aldens ever could," she thought as she went to her room. "Yet why does he seem less like a brother than they do?"

She slipped into her little new notecase Rupert Alden's card, on which he had penciled, "Who adored meeting you and looks forward to next time. *Au revoir!*"

CHAPTER VIII

THE ALMOST-KISS

"TILL we meet again," Rupert Alden had said. It turned Frankie's mind toward meetings—but not of him.

Such is human nature. In spite of this colorful first evening in Paris, it

was of New York that Frankie thought as she went to bed.

Before she fell asleep in that luxurious Ritz nest, separated from the bedroom of Mme. Griggs by the sort of silver-and-porcelain bathroom of which Frankie had, up to now, merely read, the girl in love had once more dreamed over the whole of her last dance with Robert Sevening, ending in his promise to meet her as soon as he got back from abroad.

"He doesn't know yet," thought she exultantly, "that it's *abroad* we're going to meet!"

Before she turned for the last time on her soft French pillow she had—in a way which most of us know only too well!—pictured for herself different ways in which this meeting might happen: in their Vienna hotel; on a lime-bordered foreign street; at the opera.

But it was a very different way in which Frankie was destined next to meet the man who had made such a dent on her young life.

Now, of next day's flight between France and Switzerland the girl remembered afterward three details that stood out of the general feeling of enjoyment. Mme. Griggs, composed and at ease in her armchair, upholstered in gray and blue; the fleeing shadow of the airplane across the earth, like a lonely butterfly, and the fact that they did not seem to move. The earth fell away under them, rolled past; but the plane itself appeared to hang steady in the air.

The fields of France made a pattern of jig-saw green-and-beige, beige-and-green, like a modernist bedspread. Finally they flew across a narrow winding brook; that was the Rhine. They flew over a toyish town, set upon a green pocket handkerchief embroidered with the name "Basle."

Switzerland from the air! Could any ski running come up to this? Then she caught the rug about her knees. Colder in Switzerland, she thought.

A big white cloud sped toward them, fell behind. Against the wind they sped on, the big plane steadily keeping her own. Presently, before Frankie realized that her first flight was nearly at an end, the engine noise softened. The airplane swooped like a vast swallow down toward the next of those green pocket handkerchiefs, white-embroidered, which are the landing-places. Presently wheels met earth again, gently as a full teacup is set down upon a drawing-room table, and they had landed.

A group of large, pink, wholesome-looking Swiss became busy with tickets, passports and luggage. This was Zurich.

"Honey, I'm feeling a wee bit cold! Before we go on to any hotel, we'll order some hot coffee," decided Mme. Griggs, "right here and now."

It was because they did this, instead of driving straight on into town, that little Frankie was to experience one of her life's most agonizing thrills.

THE aërodrome refreshment room was warm, comforting, and clean; full of pictures and advertisements of aircraft.

It was full at the moment, too, of hefty young airmen, whose leather flying kit hung loosely open, or was tossed over a chair beside them. These sat at tables in front of tall glass mugs of golden beer, and rumbled away in a happy masculine way, in German.

As the American lady and girl entered, the pilots courteously made room for them at one of the tables.

Coffee and cakes were brought by a red-cheeked Swiss waitress.

The pleasant, fair-faced young men cast appreciative glances as Frankie pulled off her big coat and sat down again all tiny and trim, dragging her black béret further down over her gilt crop.

"I understand German," murmured Mme. Griggs. "This, however, might be Greek. They are being heavily technical, about weather conditions, and the difference this wind is going to make—"

She broke off, to look up, with Frankie, interested. The door had burst open. Another tall, leather-helmeted, long-booted figure clumped into the room, called something in rapid-fire German to his colleagues, and clumped out again. The pilots rose as one man and strode after him, uttering exclamations.

A quick "Mercy!" broke from Mme. Griggs. She, too, sprang up, putting down her cup of excellent hot coffee hardly tasted; she caught up her crocodile bag, and took hold of Frankie's sleeve. "Come along out, Honey; I've got to see what's happening—"

"What is it, Mme. Griggs?"

"Why," exclaimed Mme. Griggs, hurrying her through the doorway, "that young man came in to say they'd been phoned from a look-out station that a light aëroplane had been sighted. It's an English plane, a Moth, and the pilot seemed to be in difficulties."

"A flyer, in difficulties— Do they mean—in danger?"

Now little Frankie, during the smooth luxury of their flight, had forgotten that there can be danger in the air, just as on the Atlantic super-liner she had forgotten that the sea can turn into a monster that rages and devours.

Dismayed, excited, she hastened with Mme. Griggs and the little crowd of other passengers, pilots, officials, out into a cold gust that now swept the landing field. Above that green field the sky had darkened. Through the blasts of the wind sounded a faint buzzing, now softer, now louder. The voice of the approaching Moth.

"There she is! *There—*"

Surprisingly low below the stone-gray clouds, the plane sprang into sight, first as a dim shape, then a darker, clearer shape, then a nearer shape still, showing green-and-silver; she was sobbing, hesitating, as it were with a catch in her voice now—why, she seemed hardly high enough to miss the hedges?

Little Frankie, who was hopelessly unmechanical, could not be expected to pick out of the Moth's hesitating rhythm a message that something was wrong. But as she tiptoed, widening her eyes to watch that plane, now and then lost to sight behind a taller tree, while the starved engine uttered a death rattle, then she knew that there was cause for alarm.

There was also worse cause for her alarm.

"*He's* over there, in that little plane!"

WHAT had told her this? It was true. Robert Sevening, a bare two days ago, had decided to accept the offer of an English friend of his who had crossed with him. The friend owned a plane, and Sevening had borrowed it for a trip he wanted to take—the trip by air to Central Europe. Though a keen enough pilot, he had not long been at the glorious game. Experience should have told him that the unexpected winds which met him over Switzer-

land not only delayed him, but used up more gas than he had bargained for. At Basle he should have landed.

Robert Sevening miscalculated. He thought he could get to Zurich instead, but his gas gave out and left the Moth battling with the air above a field of young corn, a quarter of a mile from the landing ground.

Now everybody at the aërodrome saw what was happening. The crowd sped helter-skelter over the grass toward the edge of the 'drome, and before them ran Frankie, as if for dear life. Although she could not understand German, she had caught the sense of what one pilot shouted to another: "All up if he crashes on to the road!"

"Mustn't!" gasped Frankie. "Oh, but it can't be him," she comforted herself in anguish — there would not have been time to speak the words that rushed through her brain as she ran, yet it seemed long enough for her to write them out. "It can't be my Robert Sevening! He doesn't fly. He'd never come from London by air. Of all the men in the world, how *could* it be him?"

Yet she knew it was—how? Steamships carry wireless; airplanes, while speeding through the air, can be kept in touch with the earth. This is no supernatural miracle? But no name has yet been invented for that curious contact at a distance which can exist between mother and son, sweetheart and beloved. Love is a force, after all, not less powerful than that which guides the wave lengths of the radio.

Frankie, running, seemed to hear her own heart beat as loudly as the Moth's engine. Suddenly even that erratic throb of the Moth's was cut off, as if by a knife. The crippled plane dropped, one wing tilted up, out of control.

"Oh, my God—" Now! . . . He could not escape some awful accident?

Frankie shut her eyes. She seemed to feel, as well as hear, that crash. But it was not the deafening explosion she had dreaded. It was a lighter, rending, drawn-out crackling impact.

The girl opened her eyes. A gasp broke from her.

Surely to the end of her days there would remain photographed most vividly in color on Frankie's heart this picture:

Towering gray windy skies; bright green cornfield; between the two a cherry tree and that angular jazzy confusion of the crashed and tilted Moth.

By a hair's breadth she had missed being dashed against the sturdy trunk, since she had caught, like a child's balloon, in the branches. A great blossoming bough had crashed through one wing easily as the circus rider breaks through the tissue paper that covers the hoop. The bough had broken the shock, holding the light machine transfixed. No flames. Only this tangle of boughs, struts, machinery, green-and-silver, painted fabric, all veiled by that foam of whitely-flowering cherry. And what about the man, the man?

From up there among the foaming blossom there emerged glimpses of long limbs sheathed in black, zip-fastened leather, a brown, gripping hand, a black-helmeted head that twisted backward, a face with goggles pushed up from its brow; a sunburned face, peering down as if in surprise at the sight of that crowd.

"Are you all right?" called in anxiety the nearest German pilot. He shoved up a broad shoulder, on which the man in the tree set his hand; let himself to the ground with a "Thanks so much."

Robert Sevening looked about with a deprecating, reassuring grin that showed his strong teeth, white as the petals that, like confetti at a wedding, had showered down over his wrecked plane, his broad black leather-clad shoulders, his helmeted head.

"No damage?" asked another pilot, in excellent English.

"Not to me, thanks," retorted Sevening as he bent to unfasten his helmet strap. "I'm afraid *she's* badly smashed."

Bareheaded, he turned toward tree and wreck.

Then he saw something which seemed to excite him more than the accident had. His brows went up; he had just caught sight of that girl.

There she stood, small and neat, two little feet in new snakeskin shoes tiptoe on the ground among that cherry-blossom confetti, two small hands clutched together and caught to her mouth. Her small face was an oval of anguished concern, lifted to his. Who, he wondered, was this distraught little creature who looked as if she—not he—had just missed crashing to death? For less than an instant Sevening stared at her. In less than an instant he recognized her. With a laugh he caught both her little hands from under her chin and sang out gayly:

"*Sunshine Girl?*"

INSTANTLY, Frankie became the only quiet person in that agitated throng that pressed about the flyer out of that broken machine. Frankie, you see, was paralyzed with amazement.

"Sunshine Girl?" she thought. "Meaning *me?*"

On raced her thoughts.

"What's more, he's going to kiss me! Will he? Yes, no, yes, no, he's only just remembered in time that we don't, that he never has, that he can't anyhow before all these people here. He won't. But he was going to," she thought. "It was almost a kiss, I know!"

This time the girl's instinct had been guided, not by misleading wish dreams, but by that Force—not to be understood or denied—which, three minutes ago, had warned her who had been flying in the Moth. Call the Force woman's wireless! This time it had sent out a true message!

For young Sevening—yes, even in the midst of the general hubbub, the polyglot chorus of relief, sympathy, and thanksgiving that the crash had meant no worse—young Sevening was ordering himself: "Pull yourself together! What the Something were you just going to do? Catch this little thing up into your arms and *kiss* her? Just because she looked scared you've nearly killed yourself? Can't do that, mustn't do that, not with this little girl, no excuse if she is so dashed sweet. Can't be thought of! What'll you be letting yourself in for next? None of that! *Stop!*"

And the young man who had so nearly crashed into a demonstration of affection—as well as into a blossoming cherry tree—pulled himself up in time. Back he came to the confusion of the moment; to the field, the crowd, the helpful pilots, the plans for salvaging his wrecked plane. Presently there had to be his introduction to Frankie's Mme. Griggs. Then there were orders to the Swiss mechanics, discussion about repairing the Moth. There were also telegrams, cablegrams. In a flood of practical details the young man drowned any sound of the voice of his heart.

"Dashed sweet, that girl looking

scared out of her little life that you'd gone and done yourself in as well as the Moth. By Jove, you badly wanted to pick her up and kiss her in front of the entire mob! Unless you keep the brakes on you'll be *doing* it, one of these days. You dashed well nearly kissed her, then!"

He silenced that voice.

Not so little Frankie.

Her horrible fright had shaken her to the strings of her too-affectionate heart. Then she had set her teeth and muttered: "Brace up!" Had then helped herself, with compact and lip stick, to reassume her usual, casual, Laura-La-Plantish, Modern-Girl mask. . . . Under this she listened—all the time she and Mme. Griggs drove to the hotel over the lovely lake of Zurich—to the murmur of her inmost thoughts. She listened during dinner. After it, they put in an hour at a concert. Frankie heard no music but that of a remembered exclamation:

"Sunshine Girl!"

Sometimes one thinks one's cup of joy must be about full; then comes another drop of sweetness.

That "Sunshine Girl" had been pure honey. So were Sevening's inquiries of: "Where are you ladies putting up? Do you mind if I join forces with you? Afraid I'll be busy this evening; but we'll breakfast together, if you don't mind? I'll get a seat in the German plane in the morning. Yes, I've got to push on too." Sevening's manner took it for granted that theirs would be a jolly party of three in Vienna. Frankie found it almost too much to look forward to. Again she looked back on that magic moment.

"Imagine *his* bursting out into pet names . . . I wondered if he had one for me, as I have '*Striped-Scarf*' for him. So he *has?*" mused Frankie, drawing the curtains aside from her window. It looked out on a moonlit flowering garden, on the silver lake, screened by those mountains. "Isn't life *lovely?* Anyhow, since I met *him!*" sighed Frankie.

She sounds maudlin and sloppy? That is the fault of cold print. What creature in love could confide her inmost thoughts to a printed page seeming maudlin, sloppy, and absurd?

"Grabbing both my hands so hard it *hurt* me!" Frankie brooded on.

"Lovely—"

"Not only that, but the Other Thing—"

Here, though at the time she was standing quite alone in her dark room, Frankie's small ears turned warmly pink at the memory—"*It was an almost kiss!*"

(Good night, absurd Frankie.)

Next morning, crisp as a biscuit and briskly ready for flight, she might—from the look of her—never have known a sentimental thought. Certainly she might never have allowed her thoughts to respond with an imagination-kiss to the almost-kiss of that young man. Carrying Mme. Griggs's crocodile bag and umbrella, she met Sevening in the hall with the lightest "Good morning," and, yes, actually achieved a laugh to notice that he had, in his crash, scored no more than a mere scratch from that twig. He had a black eye.

"You look," Frankie told him, "as if you had been involved in some *most* disreputable row last night!"

BEFORE ten in the morning they were once more in the air.

Frankie, who had heard that the two factors which keep modern life worth living are (*a*) the old game of

Love, and (*b*) the comparatively new sport of Flying, had a secret, exultant wonder. "And what about combining the two? What, when you happen to go flying with the person you love?"

Only one blot on the rapture—that it is too quickly over! Too soon, the three of them were getting out at Munich; too soon another plane was carrying them high over Germany. Too soon they were passing over the border. Then for moments Austria was hidden from them by a sudden spread of cloud after little cloud.

Sevening turned to her presently, pointed d o w n w a r d, and shouted "Vienna!"

Frankie pressed her forehead to the pane. She gazed down upon mile after mile of spring-green forest. She gazed down upon a broad, meandering stream—"The *Danube?* They said it was *never* blue? From up here it's blue as a baby's eyes!" she cried, unheard. Set in this fairy landscape the city slid into sight; symmetrical as a golden egg in a green nest. It glowed in the late sunlight like a trayful of warm jewels, neither gold nor green nor brick color, but a blending of all. Frankie looked down on roofs patterned like her own snakeskin shoes; on churches with twin spires; on a church with a cupola, that looked like a vast soap bubble. She saw stately gold-gray buildings which were those of the University, the Houses of Parliament, the Opera, the Imperial Palace. Further out another palace, set among stately parks—on a hill crowned by a Greek temple. Streets were garlanded with greenery, trees, turf, and bushes; everywhere gardens and parks were in freshest leaf and flower.

Presently, for the last time on her trip, Frankie heard that song of the engine slacken and stop. Up came a great grassy field with a line of hangars with red-and-white flags a-flutter, buildings, and something that looks like a waving scarf of welcome, but which is in reality smoke from the underground furnace kept up so that alighting planes might know by the smoke which way the wind was blowing. Here was Aspern, Vienna's aërodrome. Again, and for the last time, wheels touched grass, and Frankie sighed because they had come to earth.

"Sorry?" asked young Sevening, smiling down at the girl, who was immediately comforted to hear again that pleasant deep voice which had of course been inaudible for the last two hours. "Sorry to land, Frankie?"

"Yes. No!" she smiled happily back at him. She meant: "What would it have been like to arrive at this place, and the end of the flight, knowing that this meant *the end of being with him?* But this is only the *beginning!*"

CHAPTER IX

JEALOUSY

HOW often during the next week Frankie asked Heaven to bless Mme. Griggs for having decided to defy the beauty doctors of New York and Paris and to come to Vienna for her new mysterious treatment!

On the first evening of their arrival, when Venus, Mme. Griggs's colored maid, announced that the specialist had made an appointment for Monday, impetuous Frankie had broken out with "Oh, but dear Mme. Griggs! I do hope this specialist person will be *careful!*"

"About what, Honey?"

"About — about all this rejuvenation!"

Mme. Griggs sat down on the edge

of her bed and shook with laughter. Tiny, black-eyed, coffee-cream-skinned Venus joined in her amusement.

"It's serious," persisted Frankie. "One's heard such ghastly stories about face lifts." Gossip enough she'd heard at Cytherea's of facial surgery. "After one of these surgeons got through with her, one client came in looking one person on one side of her face and quite another on the other side; everybody in New York called her 'Heads-or-Tails.' Oh, *don't* let anything like that happen, dear Mme. Griggs! Of course I'd love to think you could be made to look twenty-five again, but—"

"I should not," declared Mme. Griggs, blithely. "Honey, I see how you come by this mistake. Most women make a mystery of rejuvenating treatment; well, I've made a mystery of growing old gracefully."

"Growing *old?*" repeated Frankie, opening bright eyes.

Her job at Cytherea's dealt only with women refusing to grow anything but younger. Cytherea's had a booklet called *"That Clock's Twenty Years Fast,"* all about mistaken ladies who think it's time to settle down just because they're great grandmothers!

Mme. Griggs broke into very unusual confidences. She did not wish to regain streamlines, nor to have tucks taken in her throat. On the contrary, she wished—for the sake of her son's children, who were to visit her that summer, to be transformed into the real *old-fashioned* sort of granny that they would like to find.

In her soft Southern voice Mme. Griggs told Frankie: "I've had most forty years of getting all the 'kick' there is out of being young and pretty, and having man after man, like Richard Alden, crazy about me. What I want now is to please Raymond, my son, the apple of my eye. Evangeline is the loveliest daughter in the world, but—"

Evangeline, it seemed, to be candid, kept her mother scared *frozen.*

"Honey, Evangeline's mental picture of me is of a smart, hard, well-preserved, bridge-playing, dancing, American mother somewhere between thirty-five and fifty-five. Sixty-five is what I'll be next month, and I want to relax into the *sweetest* old granny! That's my mental picture of myself. We've all got them."

"I suppose we have." Frankie's mental picture of herself showed her the almost-fiancée of Mr. Robert Sevening.

"So I just had to get away from Evangeline, and my Paris dressmaker and my New York hair-dyer. There's one place here in Vienna which bleaches me back, in a few days, from this bright mahogany to my natural pale moonlight silver. So if I do that, and leave off all this make-up, and fix myself up with some of the 'softening' gowns I fancy, instead of those terribly '*right*' ones"—she nodded at the wardrobe trunk—"which Evangeline *will* order for me, well! maybe my daughter will have a shock, but my son will prefer to—"

Here the telephone rang.

Venus put out a tiny chocolate hand and answered it.

"A gentleman downstairs has called to know if the ladies are comfortably settled and have dined? He had heard the Gracious Lady say that she intended to go early to bed," reported Venus, "so he wondered if he might be allowed to call for the Gracious Young Lady?"

"Oh, yes. Say that the Gracious Young Lady will be down right away."

Mme. Griggs, with an indulgent smile, added that, though she was just terribly sorry that poor young Rupert Alden was to be supplanted, she was glad for the sake of little Miss Carter herself that "her beau" had been able to arrange to travel over to be with her here.

As she came out of the little telephone room, Sevening demanded, "Have you had bad news?"

"My beau?" repeated Frankie, looking up from rustling layers of tissue paper which she was helping Venus to fold. "You don't mean Mr. Sevening?"

"Honey, I haven't seen any one else that I could possibly mean."

"Heavens!" gasped Frankie, pink with confusion. "Not at all! Mr. Sevening hasn't come over here on purpose to be with *me*, Mme. Griggs, I assure you."

Mme. Griggs did not look assured. She smiled. "Not?"

"Certainly not! For one thing, how could he *afford* it?" said Cytherea's receptionist, never guessing that she spoke of the prosperous owner of Cytherea's and other Beauty Shops. Always she thought of him as the young commercial traveler; had he not said

he was a Tired Business Man, and a Daily Breader like Frankie herself? She said, in warmly-pitying, half-motherly tones, which Mme. Griggs found very touching from that young mouth, "The poor boy's awfully hard up!"

"Hard up? Is he? Honey, he scarcely gives me that impression."

"Why? Because his clothes are nice? He makes them look nice; they might look nothing on anybody else," protested Frankie, still more earnest and pink. "Or because he travels by air? But that wasn't his Moth that he crashed; he told me that he'd borrowed her from an opulent pal in England, and I suppose he'll have to pay for the repairs. Frightful, isn't it? As for the other flights, of course his expenses will be paid by his firm; he's over here on business, you see. Traveling for his firm."

"And what is this firm, Honey?"

"I don't know," Frankie said. "I've never asked him."

Mme. Griggs nodded the brightly mahogany-colored shingled head which she intended to transform into mother-of-pearl.

"I guess," she said meditatively, "our Mr. Sevening *rather enjoys making a little mystery about himself*, just like me!"

"Oh, no! I don't think so," little Frankie loyally defended the adored Sevening—all the more warmly because he *had* made mysteries. Several! For instance, what about that policeman who arrested him under Frankie's very eyes? What had been the meaning of that? And what, after all—what *was* his job?

Well, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered except that by incredible good luck he was over here now.

"Anyhow, Honey, run off now and have a real good time with your—your *friend!*"

FRANKIE was a little breathless when she arrived in the hall to greet her Beloved.

Yes! There he stood by the desk, bareheaded, wearing his light overcoat and a patch over the eye that had been blackened by his crash.

"Hello, Frankie! Off duty? Good. Here's a cityful of music and sidewalk cafés and parks and amusing people waiting for us to go out and sample it!"

Sevening's smile — friendly, no, more than friendly; brotherly, oh no, not brotherly! All the best of brother and friend, with so much else in it!—made Frankie's heart leap as she thought:

"The one man in the world. There isn't such a thing as another!"

But the hotel receptionist seemed to differ.

"There is another gentleman," he announced in English, "to speak to the young lady from Room 333. Ah! Miss Carter. Please you are wanted on the telephone, miss. Long distance call, from Paris."

"From Paris!" exclaimed Frankie. "Oh! That must be Mr. Alden, Mme. Griggs's *oldest* friend, who was at the Ritz with us. Excuse me a minute," she added to young Sevening, and scurried into the little telephone room. "I'm afraid something dreadful must have happened—"

But it was nothing dreadful! It was not Mme. Griggs's oldest admirer. It was young Rupert, whom Mme. Griggs described as "Frankie's Paris Conquest."

"I wanted to hear your voice, Miss Carter. You'd had a pleasant trip?"

"Oh! Yes, thank you."

(Pause. Wasn't that *all?* thought Frankie.)

"Miss Carter, you don't enthuse?"

"What about? The flight? Oh! Lovely. Tired? Oh, no. Not—not of flying! Going to do now? I'm going out to one of these coffee houses in the park, to hear some music. They always seem to have dinner in one place and coffee in another, in Vienna. No! Mme. Griggs wanted to go to sleep. Er— No, I'm not going alone. A friend of ours has just called—"

"—and he's been kept waiting," Frankie thought, tapping with her little shoe, "ages already!" Why must she be held up in this telephone cell, talking to a nice but unwanted man in Paris, while outside there waited for her the only man who spelled for her the True Romance? Outside waited the magic city, too. How Frankie fumed; little pink ear to the receiver!

"I might have known you'd have a date, the moment you got anywhere. I won't detain you then, Miss Carter. Only I hoped you wouldn't mind if I sent you something?"

"*Kind* of you—"

"It's just a volume of verse that's always meant a whole lot to me."

("*Verses!*" fumed ungrateful Frankie. "Keeping me here to — to woffle about *books* of poetry with the real thing getting all *wasted!*")

Voice from Paris: "When you've looked through it, Miss Carter, might I ask you to let me have one line to say just what you think?"

"Of course! Yes, I will. No, I won't forget. Now—won't you—" (She thought of the Cambridge professor's remark to his guest: "WON'T *you go?* MUST *you stay?*") "Mr. Alden, don't you want to talk to Mme. Griggs?"

"Why, no, that wasn't exactly—" A rueful laugh which ought to have touched Frankie's heart.

Who could be more heartless toward a man than a girl whom he is delaying for her date with "The One and Only?"

Frankie pretended not to hear.

"I'll get you connected with Mme. Griggs's room," called this unscrupulous little brute. "I know she'd love to have a word with you. But this is good-by for the present from me. Good night, Mr. Alden!" ("AT LAST!")

"No bad news?" smiled Sevening, pushing open the glass door for Frankie to pass out into the lighted square of fountains and stone nymphs. "Was it the old gentleman?"

"No; it was the young one. His grandson who took me out to dance, that evening in Paris."

"*I* see," said Robert Sevening, and helped her into a taxi without another word.

Fate had now sent to Frankie's side Jealousy, as a green-eyed ally!

THE taxi was out of the streets and bowling along Prater Alley with its double border of chestnuts before Sevening said:

"Well, I can't say you seem to have wasted much of your time in Paris, Frankie!" Almost any other girl would have rejoiced at the resentment in his voice. "You were there only one evening, and you did a dinner, and a theater, and a dance! Sounds as if you'd had a most amusing time."

Ah, what a weapon Jealousy had put into Frankie's hand! Think how almost any girl you know would have used it!

But Frankie said: "It wasn't amusing, that last place. So then he drove me home. He was so *nice* and—"

Here she pulled up. She had just remembered what else that susceptible young man named Rupert Alden had nearly done.

"What were you going to say?"

Frankie thought, "Talking about some other man's admiration would be *bragging.* And horrid. And— Anyhow, that's nothing to do with *this!*" So all she said was that the Aldens were coming home in the summer, and she had promised to go out with them somewhere.

"How jolly. For everybody," said Sevening gayly.

They stopped, just then, at a fairy-tale-looking restaurant to which these Viennese are fond of driving out from their town, to dine and dance, or merely to take coffee and to murmur *à deux* on that entrancing balcony, with its semicircle of small tables.

On to it open French windows, close to which the orchestra plays. It was not playing any jazz tune as these two came up; no jazz, which is the music of unrest. It was playing music which has the melody and rhythm of dreams.

"An 'old-fashioned waltz'," said Frankie as she and Sevening sat down at one of the small tables with its rosy light, its vase of roses. "It doesn't *sound* old-fashioned over here somehow."

She pulled off her little hat, and her small face became that of a cherub in a nimbus of gilt curls.

"You're letting your hair grow a bit longer," Sevening noticed. "Suits you; you generally know what suits you—"

He was thinking: "It's not *merely* your looks I like, and your dancing. I like your ways, my dear. Your independence about your job. The way you spoke of your boss. Your manner to your people, and to your old lady, and to your dogs, and to me, bless your little heart. I like the fact that there's not a spot of the gold digger in the whole of your composition. By Jove, I've had some sickeners on that count, I can tell you. I'll tell you presently. *You* still think I'm a forty-a-week man, and you don't give a hoot. You're pals with me for myself alone. But what's this, about this fellow who drives you all over Paris, and rings you up from one end of the Continent to the other, and makes dates to take you out the instant you're home again? Tell me. What is this Alden?"

He was within an inch of saying all this to her, when the waiter came up for the order.

"Two coffees with cream, please. And two—Benedictine, Frankie?"

"Yes, please! No, I forgot. I don't take liquors," Frankie remembered.

Sevening pulled out cigarettes, and of all that long, unspoken speech pronounced only the last sentence.

"Tell me, what is this Alden? Ah, the big automobile people? Glad you scored a wealthy grandson."

"He isn't only wealthy," said Frankie, sitting up in her chair. She was remembering that other evening, the Paris evening of orchids and homage.

"Rupert Alden was a dear. Besides being intelligent. *And* very nice-looking!"

Any other girl would have said this to spur the man. Frankie, in her innocence, said it because she meant it.

"Liked him so much, did you?"

"Of course I liked him. One couldn't *help* liking him!"

Young Sevening grunted. "Fortunate, isn't it, when an attraction is mutual?"

At that instant he was not far from adding: "But look here, you don't like him better than *me,* do you? To h——

with that guy! Couldn't you think about marrying me?"

The words were in his heart—

CHAPTER X

ENCHANTED NIGHTS

YES, the man's heart seethed with resentment of that possible rival. Resentment could have driven the declaration up from his heart to his lips.

Do you not know girls who would have played up to this? But that was not Frankie's way.

In indignant surprise she echoed: "Attraction? Do you mean you think *I* was attracted?"

"Weren't you?"

"Keen about Rupert Alden?"

"Aren't you?"

Sevening watched her out of his unhurt eye. He did not know what to believe. He was guessing. Ah, the good use that some girls would have made of keeping him guessing! Little Frankie made her first big mistake. Living up to her name, she cried: "*No!* Attracted to Mr. Alden? In that way? Honor bright, no; never."

Truth rang in her clear voice as she shook her head till the cherub curls danced. Truth shone in her bright eyes. Robert Sevening laughed.

"Don't you believe me?" she said in dismay.

"Oh, yes, I believe you, Frankie," said he, leaning back in his chair again. Suspense had left him. There was nothing to worry about. "I quite believe you," he repeated.

And Frankie, who for all her birdlike quickness had been so slow at the uptake here, never suspected how nearly he had said something very different at that very moment.

And so "things" went on "as they were."

Frankie's time for a week was divided into Existence before—and Life after—7.30 P. M.

During the sunshiny day she was at the service of Mme. Griggs, the world's most delightful employer, leading the Hotel Life Luxurious, and seeing Vienna's more expensive aspects.

But the evenings—

Oh, those evenings! That blissful second part of Life, after seven thirty, when the telephone message came up from the desk to say: "The gentleman is here for the Gracious Young Lady!"

Each of those enchanted evenings was passed in a setting so like some foreign scene at a theater that Frankie could have expected at any moment to hear people break into applause.

And everywhere, always, this was the refrain to the thoughts of this girl in love—"*When is he going to tell me that he cares for me, too?*"

"Wonderful evening it's been, Frankie, hasn't it?" he would say.

Only that was all he did say.

She would think: "To-morrow, perhaps!"

But evening after evening passed, and still he had not *mentioned* Love.

When would he? She wondered.

Surely she is not the only girl in love to wonder that? If she is, I cannot help it; she just wondered, feeling a chill at her heart, "Perhaps to-morrow?"

Once he took her on a Danube steamer, up that great, swiftly flowing river, terrifyingly strong, so that one is astounded that men could pit their strength and energy against it, which they have done in mile after mile of stone bank.

When they disembarked they walked for miles along the stone banks, townward. They talked happily together,

but about other things than proposals. Sevening asked after Frankie's charming little mother. Frankie said something about darling Mrs. Carter never remembering that we don't live in Queen Victoria's time; Mum, who liked to wear the latest sports frocks, still wore hoop skirts on her mind, Frankie thought. Yet Dad remained unchangingly crazy about her. Mum, who couldn't even *pretend* to be on equal terms with him! "She doesn't think a woman ought to behave or *be* like a friend of her husband's!"

"I think she's right," young Sevening said. Half laughingly he added: "Why can't you adopt some of these Victorian gestures and views of life, Frankie, my child?"

But Frankie laughed scornfully. "Imagine a hoop skirt in a sports car, Mr. Sevening! Imagine one in the subway! And, above all, imagine one in an airplane!"

"Ah, there you're right," he admitted. "I suppose I mean— Well, never mind! If you can do another mile, Frankie, we come to a Heurigen."

"What's that?"

"Oh, it's where you drink wine and listen to music." They went to the Heurigen. She enjoyed sitting in the big room, with its long tables and groups of cheerful, noisy people. She enjoyed listening to songs about Wine and Mine, and sipping raspberry juice.

Very late they came home.

It was after this evening that Frankie remembered her sister Win's young man, of whom Win had said *one* thing she'd liked about him was that he proposed at once "instead of being like some of these *nerve*-racking admirers whose *intentions* are obvious for months before they blossom out into a proposal!" Win had been glad her Ronald "wasn't like that!"

Frankie was bound to admit that her Striped Scarf was being rather "like that"!

THE week was now speeding by. Came Saturday, last of the enchanted evenings.

"Where do we spend it, Frankie?"

"Somewhere *out*, shan't we? I love all the open-air places near hills and woods—"

"Right." He chose a high-set restaurant, from which one looks down upon the lighted, lovely city lying in its valley, like a brilliant sequined scarf flung down on a dark carpet.

"Means three-quarters of an hour in two trolleys. Sorry I haven't got my little bus over here. And I'm sorry it doesn't run to taxies." How could Frankie guess why? She had no idea how carefully the young man had arranged for these magical outings to be "on the cheap." Because of that unnecessary Complex of his—of being loved for *himself*—he had more than once allowed his little Sunshine Girl to "make it a Dutch treat!"

The day must come, of course, when she would find out that he was the boss of Cytherea's and many other places, when she would have to know that a month's income could buy up any place of amusement to which he chose to take her. But he was not yet going to let her in on that! It was incredibly sweet to this wealthy young business man to realize how genuinely this girl enjoyed herself wherever he took her, firmly convinced in her innocence that it was all he could afford.

SEVENING, having ordered their dinner, glanced round other white tables, other white chairs—nearly all empty under the whispering lime trees.

"What a lot of young couples!" he said. "All drinking coffee—nothing else. And none of them eat here; they've 'dined' at home. And they probably live in those wretched flats we've just passed—row after row of yellow brick and little windows. So depressing!"

"Some of them *quite* young and *just* married!" chirped Frankie. "And not depressed at all!"

With a short chuckle Sevening told her she was an incurable little optimist. Personally he would hate to drag any young girl into a marriage that meant those flats—

Whereupon the impulsive Frankie thought: "He hates the idea of 'dragging' a girl into poverty! *That's* why he doesn't propose? That's why he doesn't say he cares? What shall I do?"

She prepared to make another bad break.

UP to another table there had come a band of hefty young Austrians. One started to play his guitar. He strummed; the others sang the song of a heart, lost in Heidelberg. Into their tuneful noise sounded the determined voice of little Frankie Carter.

"Mr. Sevening—"

Although he called her Frankie, the girl never called him anything but "Mr. Sevening," or "You." This amused him. He did not guess that "Robert" was a name which she did not care for, and that she could not possibly yet call him "Striped Scarf."

"Mr. Sevening! Have you ever wondered, all these times I've been out with you, why I've gone completely *dry?*" She was pointing a slim, shiny-tipped finger at her glass of raspberry sirup and soda. His drink was the amethyst-pale light wine of the country.

"What?" said Sevening. He had been thinking about his accident, wondering if the plane was repaired yet. "Oh, well, why shouldn't you go dry? Aren't you keeping your country's law?

"Please yourself. Much better for you if you *don't* rely on alcohol. Too many girls do; they come staggering in, and telling you how they feel until they've had a Martini. You're always as happy as a little bird on those soft drinks. Why should any one try to force you the other way?"

"As a matter of fact, I've just been forbidden," she said. "For the rest of my life. One cocktail, and *I lose*—" She opened her bright eyes, nodded her small cherub head, and said seriously: *"All my money!"*

Sevening, amused, said: "Would you, by Jove? How's that?"

Then, for the reason that she had just thought of, she told him.

Sevening no longer wore a patch over the crashed eye. That injury, having faded from indigo to blue, and blue to green, had now reached the yellow stage, which any one but Frankie would have found most unbecoming. "Do you suppose," he asked her, twinkling, "do you suppose Cytherea's business will be able to go on without its beauteous receptionist?"

He smiled at the receptionist who was dressed to match her pet name in sunshine-yellow.

"You look a picture to-night!" he added suddenly.

Imagine the ecstasy of this, the first direct compliment she had received from him. "Oh, *I am so glad you think I'm pretty!*" her heart was crying.

He wondered if she was not going

to speak again. "You needn't go on being a receptionist—"

"No. I'm a New-rich Lady of Leisure," Frankie pointed out to him, "with private means of"—she drew a long breath—"of *almost two thousand* a year!"

"Heavens! Frankie! Little Miss Midas with gold all round her," he laughed. He picked up one of her golden hat ribbons and held it. "You don't mean to say that you've got all that to yourself?"

"I do. Apart from business," enlarged Frankie. She was encouraged, as she had never been before, by thinking she knew now why he had not been definite—he was unable to support a wife—and by his intoxicating compliment, and by the tiny, tremendous trifle of his holding her hat ribbon. "You see," she added, to the wealthy owner of all those flourishing shops, "that this makes me absolutely independent!"

What she meant was: "Try and understand that this alters everything, because now I should not be any expense to any man who married me. I've got money of my own. Don't you see?"

Apparently he didn't.

He laughed.

She could not tell that he was laughing at the endearing importance she gave to almost two thousand a year. Good Lord, that wouldn't take him far. But to her, bless her innocent heart, it was wealth, wealth!

"I don't know why I laughed," he said, when she asked him. "It's really a serious matter. Here you are, of course, what is vulgarly known as 'A Catch.' You don't want to be a mark, do you, for any fortune hunter?"

And presently it was time to go home; another evening had faded away, and still, still, although he now knew he would not be dragging a nice girl into poverty, he had not proposed!

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST-MINUTE LOVER

NOW when young Sevening heard from Frankie's own lips that she had come in for "*a fortune, ha, ha!*" (two thousand a year being a joke to him) he only thought that his little Miss Midas was braced to the eyes about it, as she might have been over winning some beauty prize, and that she had *had* to tell him.

Nothing else struck him until after he had said good night.

(Yes! "*Said* good night." That almost-kiss after his crash, was still the only one he had allowed himself; and, after the way of men, he took a good deal of credit for his self-control in this matter. How often he had deliberately kept his eyes away from Frankie's little face, because it had made him think of kissing her. "Steady," he had told himself. "We haven't come to that yet." It did not strike him to wonder where Frankie had come to. It did not strike him, either, that a girl whom he liked perhaps a quarter as much as he liked her would have been kissed long ago. One cannot explain this mentality; one can only note that it is to be found in many of the nicest men—adding that they cause a great deal of suffering to some of the nicest girls.)

As Sevening sought his luxurious apartment he suddenly wondered:

"By Jove! *Was* little Sunshine trying to let me know she's an eligible young lady? Was she trying to give me a lead? Not a pretty thing to think of her, but—"

Frankie little knew how the idea chilled him.

There were so many things that Frankie little knew. Yet only a week ago there had fallen for her, neatly and completely, a most presentable, fastidious young man. Obviously she had made no mistake with him. But it is the man a girl loves about whom she makes her worst mistakes. Often this happens. Too often. In fact, always.

Mme. Griggs was reminded of the old song:

> Why don't the men propose, mamma,
> why don't the men propose?
> Each one seems coming to the point,
> and then away he goes.

On their last day in Vienna, a Sunday, the three lunched together at a restaurant famous for its gosling and young peas and "Sacha Torte."

Afterward, all the afternoon, they drove northward. Towns and villages dropped behind them; they drove through an Austria becoming ever more incredibly beautiful. The car sped on, sometimes between flowery slopes of country, sometimes along a precipitous road threading pine forests, sometimes beside a clear and laughing stream. Once the car was stopped at a point from which they could gaze at a distant range of mountains dim-blue as flowers of love-in-the-mist.

The driver pushed back his cap, pointed a brown hand at one giant blue shape.

"Ötscher."

"What's that?" asked Frankie.

It was the name of the mountain. Ötscher towered above the others with high-held head and straight-sloping shoulders, just like a well-built man in a crowd.

As they went on, young Sevening commented on how far they had driven without meeting anything but horse traffic. Yes, it was miles since the last motor cycle with a girl on the pillion, had streaked by in its cloud of dust.

"I often wonder," said Mme. Griggs, "what a speedman's sweetheart gets out of life? The girl is nothing but ballast. He doesn't even see the resigned little face, and the pretty legs stuck out behind him. What can she get out of streaking through a dust storm behind a broad leather back? What's going to be the final fate of a pillion girl?"

Sevening suggested the pillion girl might in desperation elope with the first pedestrian she saw when they dismounted. "Or perhaps she'd go in for more speed and less dust by marrying an air pilot in the end!"

A pang, half-painful, half-rapturous, took Frankie at the words. "Marrying an air pilot." To hear him say that! The incurable little dreamer's imagination rushed ahead to show her Sevening taking her hand, asking: *"Should you like to marry a pilot? Yes, I mean me!"*

Oh, would he say it? Even at the last minute?

THAT evening he and she climbed one of those hills together. They passed through a dim wood, and halted on the steep path to look down upon the twinkling lights in the valley below.

Faintly there rose to them the chime of the church clock.

Nine . . .

"This time to-morrow night," said Sevening, "I'll be on my way to Switzerland and you to Paris and home."

"Yes."

Ah, how much was in that one word.

All Frankie's good-bys to Austria, land of loveliness! Good-by to those enchanted evenings in his company! Here ended her first taste—her only taste—of what life can be like in the companionship of the Beloved.

No wonder the French proverb says: *"To go away is to die a little."*

All of this and more sounded in Frankie's "Yes."

"With any luck, I'll be back home myself in a couple of weeks. You won't forget, will you, Frankie, that we're going to make a date some time, to go out and dance somewhere?"

"I won't forget," said she, ready to be cheered at once; but then her happy little laugh broke off.

One word had chilled her. *"Some time,"* he said. Did that sound as if Striped Scarf would go on to say what she had hoped, when she'd put on her traveling coat to come out for this last evening walk?

Holding her breath, Frankie put her hand up to clutch at a pine branch, on to which she held as she stared down at the lights of that valley. They looked no larger, from up here, than a constellations of fireflies in a wood. Frankie did not see them. Every inch of her small, vital person, every crisp gold hair of her little head, was one incarnate Expectancy.

Sentimental little idiot? Yes; no doubt she was; *now*. But think! She had grown up in breezy, cheerful, uneventful surroundings which had kept her up to the age of nineteen as one of this multitude of half-boyish "modern girls" untouched by any emotion.

Then this man—now looming a tall and broad-shouldered shape on the path beside her—had come upon the scene. He had awakened her dormant feminine impulses—respect for what is physically stronger, intellectually broader; admiration for masculine comeliness; need for protection; longing for romance; delight in this unfamiliar magnetism that soothed and stimulated! Briefly, he had been the right man for Frankie—

For weeks now she had been undergoing the sufferings which almost outweigh the rapture of first love. Then, for the last week, she had known the chills and fevers of suspense. In that week he had grown immeasurably dearer. How could she go back to the old state of affairs: home, her people, the dogs, train to town, business, friends, gymnasium, tennis—all like food which—because one has a bad cold—is tasteless! Such would be her existence, with Robert Sevening left out of it. The hackneyed words framed themselves in Frankie's mind: *"I can't live without him."*

What would he say next, what, what?

The next thing he said was: "About time we turned back, isn't it? This doesn't seem to lead anywhere."

Frankie nearly laughed hysterically.

It was not light enough for Sevening to see the expression on her little face, even if he had been looking at it. He went on: "Better go back the way we came."

Then it "came" to her—*"He is not going to ask me to marry him."*

For anguished moments there was nothing but their muffled footsteps on the path. Then, as he put his pipe back into his pocket, there was a little clink of loose coins.

And at that instant there blazed up in Frankie her fatal idea:

"It's because of the money!"

Relief flooded her heart.

Rapidly her thoughts sped on.

"Money! At first he kept from saying anything because there wasn't any. Lack of money was in the way, *before* I told him about mine. And now *that's* in the way. He's too proud!"

In silence they were walking through the wood.

"He's going to ruin both our lives!" Frankie told herself wildly. "This'll be the *end*. 'Make a date to dance, some time in New York!' 'Some time!' Might never even *see* him again. *Oh!*"

Then the wildest thought yet came to her.

"If he doesn't propose to me, I'll have to propose to him, like Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort! *Have* to! Why not?"

She cleared her throat.

"Mr. Sevening," she said, and then wished she hadn't spoken so loud.

He turned to her.

She had come to a full stop on the path. Before them was the way down; behind them was that dim and fragrant wood, the courting place for happy couples who *told* each other what they felt.

"Mr. Sevening," said Frankie, in her casual, business girl voice, "do you remember one day you said you liked my frankness?"

"Did I?" said Sevening, taken aback.

"You did. I remember exactly what you said." In a voice that she made hard as nails, so that it should not tremble, she quoted his words: "'*Just like your name, aren't you? So delightfully frank! One knows you always mean what you say—*'"

Oh, fatal remark that was to be Frankie's undoing. Little fool that she was! She made the bitter mistake of thinking that to mean what one says is the same as saying all one means.

"What made you suddenly remember that?" began the young man. The girl did not let him go on. If she stopped now she would never get it out! High in the air she held her little, hatless head, she clenched her hands, and, to camouflage her distress, she put into her young voice a tone that turned her back, out of the ardent, shy, budding woman into the crisp business girl.

"Mr. Sevening, I am *not* a fool, and I can't help seeing that you admire and like me very much—"

"But, my dear child! Of course I—"

"Let me finish. You haven't said anything to me. And I've guessed why." She looked away from him, over her shoulder, back into the scented gloom of the wood. ("Gosh, how glad I am it's so dark," she thought.) Her next words came in a string as she blurted out: "If it's because of my money you needn't let it stand in the way. I don't think pride ought to stand in the way of two people being happy together—I mean it is quite fifty-fifty—after all this is 1930—I mean I should be only too glad to marry you."

Then Frankie drew a long breath, and three things seemed to happen at once.

Why did she feel no thrill when Frank came? Wasn't she engaged to him?

Another Man's Kiss

By MARJORIE GLEYRE

JOYCE watched her fiancé toss his hat on a peg and run his hand over his thinning hair before the mirror; then she lifted her face obediently for his kiss, an eager moist kiss which seemed to beseech a response.

"Look what I got to-day," she announced, cutting the kiss short despite his effort to prolong it. She put a yellow slip in his hand. "You said I could drive all right—but the inspector didn't seem to think so."

"Of course you can drive," Frank declared, without reading the report; "didn't *I* teach you?"

Right from the first he had objected to the idea of her having a car of her own. He had been teaching her to drive and had said she did well enough to take her test. So she had received the notice of her failure with much chagrin.

"Suppose you give me a lesson now," she coaxed. "I evidently need one."

"I'm pretty tired," he said slowly, "but we may as well go out—and get it over with."

She flushed. He doesn't mean it the way it sounds, she told herself firmly, it's just because he's tired. But

his manner had upset her so that she made a poor start, jerking the car and grinding the gears painfully.

"Gosh, what shifting!" he commented brusquely. "And you let your clutch up too suddenly again. You don't remember anything I tell you! No wonder you didn't pass!"

"I'll stop and start again," she said apologetically, and promptly stalled the engine.

He opened the door on his side of the car, got out and walked around to her side. "Move over," he directed, "I'll drive and you watch how I do it."

"I'll *never* learn to drive if you won't let me do it," she complained, pressing her full red lips together lest they pout.

"Come now, Joyce," he reproved as if speaking to a fractious youngster, "don't be stubborn."

He calls *me* stubborn, thought Joyce, but it seems to me he always expects his own way. While he started the car she gazed almost resentfully at his good-looking profile. That assurance of his which had first swept her off her feet was beginning to trouble her.

"I wonder how it would be if I got a driving instructor to give me some lessons," she said tentatively.

"So you're not satisfied with *my* teaching?" he accused, shooting a reproachful glance down at her.

"Of course I am!" she declared quickly, anxious not to offend him. "But it seems such a pity to bother you with it."

"I don't mind," he assured her graciously.

"But if you won't—"

"Listen here, Joy, I'll be sore if you get another teacher."

She sank back in her seat, fighting the feeling of being crushed. Why wouldn't he let her have an instructor, since he didn't care to teach her? Did he think she'd ever learn when he always did the driving?

"Tired, Joy?" he queried suddenly, in such a soft tone that it did not seem to be the same voice which had spoken before.

She could never withstand that tone—it drew her irresistibly. Sliding closer to him she nestled her head against his shoulder while the car, checked by a red light, stopped at the crossing.

But the evening was spoiled for Joyce, and she was glad when they got home.

"Going to miss me, lovely?" Frank asked later as he bade her good-by.

He was to be gone for a week or two on one of his business trips. Whenever Joyce inquired about these out of town trips he replied vaguely that he went "on business" and that he would not think of bothering her little head with tiresome details. Try as she might she could not convince him that it would not bother her, and her persistence only irritated him. Sometimes she wondered with a certain disquiet why he had to make a mystery of it; but always she checked such conjectures as disloyal. You could not distrust the man you were pledged to marry—you could not!

"Of course I'll miss you!" she assured him now, while in the back of her head was the rebellious thought that in his absence she would take some lessons from a driving instructor and he need never know the difference.

Because she felt a bit guilty for this thought she flung her arms about his neck in a warmer embrace than she had given him in a long time.

"I'll miss you all right, sweetness!" he asserted, kissing her and holding her close.

She returned his kiss dutifully; then she kissed him again—analytically to see if she could find out why he relished it so much. But the experiment was a failure. She had never been able to discover what there was about it that enchanted him so. To her it remained just "one of those things"—like shaking hands.

"THE garage manager told me you wanted me to stop in," said the tall young man who stood hat in hand on the porch.

"Oh," Joyce exclaimed, looking up into his serious face—and she had to look up pretty far because she was small and her head of soft brown curls came just below his shoulder—"you are the chauffeur who drives that big limousine?"

"I am," he assented. "Mr. Shiller said you were looking for some one to teach you to drive." He returned her gaze unsmilingly.

"I *can* drive—after a fashion," she explained. "But I don't do it perfectly enough, so I failed in my test. Mr. Shiller recommended you especially. If you can show me just how things should be done—"

She paused and waited anxiously for his reply. He looked competent enough and she hoped he was going to prove a good teacher—but how seriously he took himself!

"Of course I can show you. There are a lot of people who *think* they can drive when they don't know much about it," he observed severely.

Joyce wondered, inwardly amused, if he meant that for her.

She grinned up at him engagingly, but he barely smiled in return and she felt a bit uncomfortable. Didn't he like her? She wanted him to like her—not that it mattered, of course, so long as he was a good teacher. But it would be more pleasant.

"I'm not as dumb as I look," she asserted, provoked because he did not respond more when she was being as nice as she could be. "If you're a good teacher two or three lessons ought to be enough."

"I can't tell about that until I've been out with you."

"And I can't tell whether you're a good teacher or not until I've been out with you," she retorted smartly.

But she made an appointment for the next evening, agreeing to meet him at the garage at seven o'clock. His job prevented him from going out in the daytime.

When she arrived at the garage the next evening her heart jumped at sight of her chauffeur standing by the desk waiting for her. This was a real adventure, to be doing something purposely contrary to Frank's wishes! It gave her a pleasantly reckless, daredevil feeling.

"Hello," she greeted him. "You know, I don't even know your name. I didn't think to ask you what it was yesterday."

"My name is John McGrath."

"That sounds Irish," she observed. "Your eyes ought to be blue—"

She looked up and met two embarrassed blue eyes under a crown of thick dark hair and above a nose which was straight save for a characteristic tilt. Then he smiled—and she knew she was going to like him.

"What do they call you?"

"They call me Johnny here at the garage, but every one else calls me Mac."

"All right—Mac. Now for our lesson. I'll show you if I'm as stupid as I look."

She was eager for him to think well

of her because he had seemed so very skeptical. Why else should it matter whether those Irish blue eyes smiled for her or not?

He plunged right into business making her start and stop again and again until it began to come easier. She found herself enjoying this lesson as she had never enjoyed one with Frank. Frank's impatience had always made her nervous and shattered her confidence while Mac, though he called her down for every little move that was not perfect, seemed to inspire her with assurance. He was not ill-humored about it—he was simply teaching her to drive.

"You don't mind my bawling you out?" he asked once, rather anxiously.

"No—you're only correcting my mistakes, and that's the way to learn. I'm not dumb, am I?"

She did not mean to angle for a compliment, but as soon as she had asked the question she realized it was a good opportunity—if he wanted to take advantage of it! But apparently he did not. He was silent so long that, somewhat nettled, she answered her own question.

"All right, then. I *am* dumb."

"Most every one has to have a lot of practice," he said noncommittally.

As they turned a corner Joyce was struck by the formation of some clouds ahead of them.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed impulsively. "They look just like snow-capped mountains."

"That's right!" agreed Mac, observing them with interest.

She almost ran the car onto the sidewalk while she turned to look at him in surprise. His appreciation was so unexpected; she had merely spoken her thought with no idea of getting a sympathetic response. Frank always laughed at what he called her "flights of fancy." Mac suddenly appeared to her as a real person instead of just a chauffeur.

But Mac's mind was now on business. He put a hand on the wheel and straightened her erratic course, then cried:

"Brake—clutch! Don't you see the red light? Next thing you'll run us into a telegraph pole."

She laughed, slightly chagrined, while she stopped as quickly as she could.

"Sorry, Mac, I'll do better next time," she apologized, turning to smile at him, and was surprised to see a slight flush rising in his face.

"Look at that beauty!" he said, and indicated a sixteen-cylinder car passing them.

"The driver's no beauty!" she commented. "I wonder where such a bum got the money to buy a car like that."

"Bootlegging," he informed her briefly.

"How do you know?"

"Well—" He paused as if debating with himself whether to go on.

"Well, what?" she encouraged, her curiosity kindled.

"I used to be in the business."

"Wha-at? You!"

She turned and looked at him, and he reddened under her close scrutiny. What surprised her was that she had always thought of lawbreakers as alien creatures—and here was Mac, this boyish-looking Irish lad to whom she had been talking so comfortably, confessing to having been a bootlegger!

"I used to unload the stuff down on the shore, and then I was in business for myself," Mac went on. Then, noting her face: "Don't you like bootleggers?"

"I should say not! I think people ought to make their living honestly."

"Then I'm glad I quit!" he declared.

"How do they work it?" she queried hastily, to get away from the personal note. She was glad he had quit, and he was glad because she was glad—but what of it? He was a chauffeur—one of what Frank liked to call "the common people," and she had only engaged him to teach her to drive.

Honk! Honk! came from behind her.

"Wake up! Green light!" Mac admonished.

She came out of her trance so suddenly that she started the car like a bucking bronco and was too mortified even to try to laugh it off.

"Never mind. Every one does that once in a while," came his consoling voice as if he knew just how she felt. "I guess you're tired. I kept you out too long. Want me to drive back?"

What a dear he was—offering to drive because she was tired! Frank never gave her a chance to get tired because he liked to do the driving himself.

"Now tell me how the bootleggers do it?" she said when they had changed seats.

"A big boat comes down from Halifax with the bootleg. It stays out beyond the twelve-mile limit, and the smaller boats—rum-runners—go out and get the stuff. The trucks deliver it from the shore base."

"It's a dangerous game, isn't it?"

"You've got to take chances."

This conversation made Joyce think about Mac a lot more than she otherwise would have. She could not get over her surprise. Since I have to deal with him at all, she told herself, I like to feel that he's straight. Which was true as far as it went, except that it ignored the growing attraction which this young man had for her!

MONDAY, the day set for the next lesson, brought Frank unexpectedly back from his trip. Joyce gave him a warm welcome. But she squirmed away from his fervent kisses.

"What's the matter?" he demanded in a hurt tone. "Don't you want me to kiss you?"

"It's—sticky," she said lamely.

"You're such a child! Wait until we're married and I'll teach you how to love me!" He laughed and pressed his mouth to hers again as if he could not get enough. This time she submitted and finally, warmed by his ardor, was able to respond.

"I could eat you up!" he muttered.

"We'll give you something better to eat," she said, sliding from his arms. "But let's go for a ride before dinner."

"All you think about is your old car," he groaned. "Why don't you think about *me?*"

She wondered with rapidly beating heart what he would say to her improvement.

So they went for a ride and Joyce, proud of the way she managed everything, waited for his praise.

Presently he said in high good humor: "I told you you were getting along all right, didn't I? With me for a teacher how could you help it! And you wanted to pay for a teacher when you've got such a good one for nothing!"

He was taking all the credit himself! She realized now that he would be disagreeable if he found out what she had done. She must leave word at the garage for Mac not to come this evening.

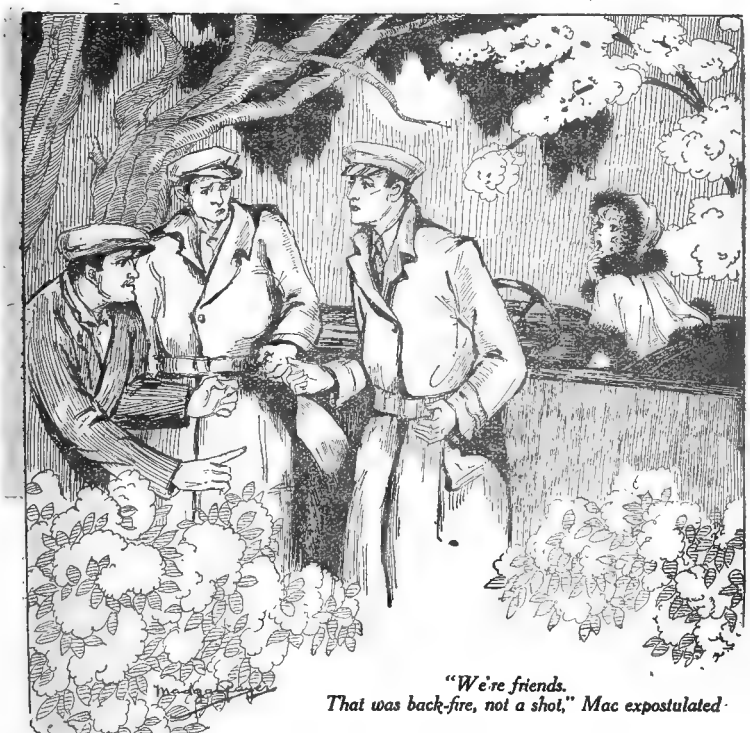
"How about going back?" Frank

suggested lazily. "This has been a pretty good lesson."

She turned the car about without a word and started for home, but indignant thoughts were swelling within her.

After dinner, when she was sitting in the porch swing with Frank, she tried to get him to tell her what he had been doing.

"Did you have a successful trip?"



"We're friends. That was back-fire, not a shot," Mac expostulated

To think he called those few minutes of driving a lesson! What a contrast to Mac's two hours and more of steady work!

She managed to get away from him at the garage and leave her message for Mac with the boy. "Tell him as soon as he comes in," she admonished.

He took one of her hands and prisoned it between both of his, but all he said in reply was, "Yes."

She looked up at him appealingly and ran her soft fingers over his cheek. "Tell me all about it, won't you?"

"Oh, lay off, Joyce," he said, his eyes narrowing with annoyance. "You know I like to get away from business when I come here."

She was about to make a snappy reply when she heard footsteps on the walk and looked up to see Mac approaching. She sprang to her feet, but it was too late to check him.

"Don't get up—I didn't mean to interrupt you," he said apologetically. "I just came over to see what the trouble was—I've been waiting at the garage since seven." He stood there holding his hat and smiling up at her, unconscious of her agitation. "Aren't you going to take a lesson to-night?"

"I left word at the garage for you," she faltered. "Didn't Joe tell you that I wouldn't be there?"

He started to come up the steps, and as he did so he saw Frank, who until now had been hidden from his view by the vines. He halted so abruptly that Joyce knew he was startled. For a moment he stood staring with his brows drawn together in an expression she was unable to read. Then he queried in a controlled voice:

"To-morrow night, then?"

At that Frank rose, thrust his hands deep into his pockets and sauntered forth.

"What's all this?" he asked, and Joyce shivered at the threatening rumble in his tone.

"I'll tell you all about it," she said quickly, and to Mac: "I'll let you know—I'll leave word with Joe."

"All right. Good night."

She watched him go down the walk, reluctant to face Frank, but his voice compelled her attention.

"What lesson was he talking about?"

She swallowed hard, forced a bright smile and turned to him innocently. "I was going to tell you about it. I thought if I took a few lessons—"

"You took lessons after I expressly told you not to?"

She sat down in the swing and pushed it nervously back and forth, trying to think of something to say to appease him.

"You're not going to take another one—do you hear?" he ordered, stalking back and forth across the porch with angry tread.

The idea of not taking any more lessons, when she regretted missing even the one to-night, was more than Joyce could stand.

"I will, too!" she cried hotly. "I'd like to know why not."

"Because I say so—that's why not." He stopped before her and his gray eyes bored into hers.

"You aren't my boss—not yet," she snapped, furious color flooding her face and neck.

"When we're married," he said slowly, emphasizing each word, "you'll obey my wishes."

"We won't have a service with the word 'obey' in it!"

"Never mind that now. Are you going to take any more lessons?"

"I am!"

"Good-by then. You can give me a ring when you come to your senses."

Without another word he walked down the steps and out of sight.

Whereupon Joyce buried her face in the cushion and tried not to cry. It was her first real quarrel with Frank. Sometimes it was hard to keep him in a good temper, but until now she had always humored him because she was so much happier when he was loving.

But in the morning her rebellion still held, and she left word at the garage for Mac to the effect that she would meet him for a lesson at seven.

She rather expected Frank to call her up and apologize, but the day passed with no word from him.

The lesson that evening did not go

very well because of her mental and emotional unrest.

"You're tired," said Mac after exercising infinite patience for over an hour. "Want me to drive back?"

Joyce agreed. She sat hugging her knees and staring morosely through the windshield while she thought of how Frank had nearly broken her heart.

"Ever been in love, Mac?" she queried abruptly into the stillness.

"Maybe I am now!" he responded in a slightly husky tone, eyes fastened on the road ahead.

She cast a quick glance at him and sighed, thinking how tragic it was if he had really fallen in love with her since she was, of course, in love with Frank.

"How about you?" he queried softly, as if a little afraid of asking such a personal question.

"I've been in love for quite a while."

"Could it perhaps be me?" He sounded breathless.

"Nope!" she replied promptly, sorry if she had unwittingly allowed him to hope. "We've had a quarrel," she added.

"You and—"

"My fiancé. The man I was with last night."

"Oh!" His voice dropped as if that settled something in his mind. "I was going to ask you about him."

"Why?"

"Well, I—oh, nothing. I just thought I'd seen him before."

There was a silence that stretched over a couple of miles. Suddenly his arm slid around her.

"Are you one of those one-armed drivers?" she tried to say lightly. Though surprised she was not offended; she was sure that he did not mean to be fresh.

"I *can* be," he answered.

She caught hold of his hand as it hung over her shoulder and felt comforted by its warm clasp. Even if Frank was hateful to her, here was some one who wanted to be nice.

"If you love the other fellow," he asked, softly prodding, "why do you let me do this?"

"I *like* you, Mac!" she declared warmly.

He turned the car into a byroad and let it gradually slow up. "Shall we stop a while?"

"No!" she vetoed vigorously.

"I thought maybe you'd kiss me," he muttered gloomily, stepping on the gas again.

She did not reply because she was considering the idea. Here was another man who wanted to kiss her—as if it was not bad enough to have Frank kissing her all the time. But Mac deserved a kiss if he wanted it so much; he had put himself out a lot for her. He was such a dear! And a kiss was a relatively unimportant thing.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked.

"I—was just going to say something," she hedged, shy about suggesting that kiss herself.

"What?" he persisted, as if partly guessing.

"Oh," she smiled and blurted, "I was going to say if you drive some place where there are not so many lights—I'll kiss you."

Like a shot the car whizzed around the next corner, flinging her against him.

"Here?" he asked with subdued agitation.

"Any place," she whispered, beginning to be frightened at what she had done.

He drove along further and drew up in a shaded street where there was

nothing but a vacant lot. As the car came to a stop Joyce turned her head away from him to look out the window, shrinking from the moment, almost regretting her offer—almost, but not quite.

He drew a deep breath, waiting. Slowly, a little fearfully, yet somehow expectantly she turned her head back until with a quick movement he had pressed his lips to hers while his arms went round her.

She had been thinking of the pleasure this kiss was going to give to him, but now she found herself almost overcome by her own pleasure. She had meant the kiss to be light and brief, but the contact was so deliciously intoxicating, his caress so blissful that she could not draw away until she had secured a long moment of rapture.

"Let's—go home," she panted.

She wanted to run away—run away from that place, run away from Mac and the lingering ecstasy of that kiss. How could she have kissed this other man when she loved Frank? But—she never wanted to prolong Frank's kisses.

Mac's voice broke into her reverie. He spoke solemnly, almost chidingly.

"What would your fellow say if he knew about this?"

Joyce squirmed uncomfortably. It was bad enough to kiss another man at all, but that she had chosen a chauffeur would be simply incomprehensible to Frank.

Mac seemed to read her thoughts, for he said gloomily: "What would he say if he knew you kissed the chauffeur?"

Joyce replied with spirit, "I wasn't kissing the *chauffeur*, I was kissing the *man*."

His hand rested on her knee for a moment in a grateful pressure.

"You don't need to be a chauffeur all your life," she reminded him.

"That's right."

When they got home he asked her when their next lesson would be.

"I—don't—know," she replied hesitantly. Her conscience had begun to trouble her.

As she walked up the block from the garage to her house she reflected that she had been rather unfair to Frank. And then she saw his car in front of her house—at this time of night!

She hurried up the steps, anxious to find out what had brought him, and hoping he had come to make up. When she reached the top step he stepped forth from the shadow of the vines as if he had been waiting for her.

"Now where have you been?" he demanded, without any greeting at all.

She shrank from the accusation in his tone, but bravely told him the truth—part of the truth. "I've been taking a driving lesson."

"Oh! A *driving* lesson!" he laughed bitterly. "It's necessary for the chauffeur to kiss you to teach you to drive, is it? I came up behind your car and recognized your license, so I passed slowly to see what was the trouble. Trouble! You were so engrossed you didn't even know a car passed."

"I—he—"

"Don't try to get out of it. Facts speak for themselves. Here I was coming to apologize—*I* was going to apologize to *you*—and that's what I find!"

"He—please listen, Frank!—he has done so much for me, and wouldn't let me pay him—"

"So it's *that* kind of an arrangement?"

"Don't be evil-minded! He didn't make love to me even, but I saw how

he felt, and I knew one kiss of gratitude would mean so much—"

"Kiss of gratitude!" he sneered. "Since when have *you* been so crazy for kissing that you even give them for gratitude? And a chauffeur—you kiss a chauffeur!"

She started to slip off her engagement ring.

"No, you don't!" he cried huskily, grabbing her hand and forcing the ring back on her finger.

With a rough jerk he brought her to the swing and, seating himself, pulled her down onto his knees.

"Now kiss *me* as if you liked it," he directed hotly, "give *me* a kiss of gratitude for not throwing you over after such a dirty trick."

The old familiar ecstasy gripped her as he drew her closer

She yielded her lips to his and tried to respond fully, anxious to make amends for her moment of madness. Self-reproach made her submissive until breathless and bruised she could

stand it no longer and began to whimper.

"Now perhaps you'll remember you belong to me!"

He pushed her off and rising to his feet started away. But before he reached the steps he turned abruptly and came back to where she stood with the tears dripping down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry I was so rough, Joyce," he said gently, taking both her trembling hands in his. "I forgot myself. Perhaps you will agree that I had good reason to." He bent and kissed her temperately. "We'll say you made a mistake to-day, and let it go at that. But," and his voice became as hard as it had been soft, "don't let it happen again—unless, of course," and now there was a sneer in his tone, "you prefer the chauffeur!"

For a week Joyce saw Frank every day. He was in a splendid humor and they had some delightful times together. She tried to crowd out of her mind all troublous thoughts of Mac, but again and again the rapture of his kiss came back to her. When she could not find the same ecstasy in Frank's lips she concluded it was because the other man's kiss was "stolen fruit."

Anyway, she was engaged to Frank, and of course she loved him, and it was ridiculous to worry about that past blunder.

All was well until Frank announced his departure on another trip.

"Frank," she said soberly, "I want you to tell me about it. It's too silly not even to know what one's fiancé is doing."

"Oh, Joy, have a heart. Why do you have to know everything?"

"It's not 'everything.' Bet you're a bootlegger in disguise!" she taunted jokingly.

"I don't care for that kind of a joke!" he said, turning red from crown to jowl. "You know darn well I'd have nothing to do with that sort of game!"

"Don't be silly!" she retorted impatiently. "Come on, tell me."

"Well," he conceded, "I'll tell you all about it when I get back."

"You won't do anything I ask," she pouted. Then on a sudden inspiration: "We'll make a bargain. As long as you won't tell me your business, I'll take driving lessons. It's too mean that I haven't got my license yet."

With the words a vivid picture of Mac came to her mind, and she knew she wanted to see him again—she knew that it was neither the license nor the lessons, but Mac for whom she was arguing!

"You won't take lessons of that—that fellow, will you?" he queried crossly. "If you kiss him—or any other fellow, I'm through. Understand that!"

MAC and Joyce were both on their guard at their next meeting. He had his whole attention on her driving and even the way he looked at her was impersonal. While she found herself remembering his kiss most distressingly!

"I guess you're ready for your test," he announced after they had driven for an hour.

"Oh!" she objected. "I don't feel confident enough yet. We'll have to go out every evening for a while."

He looked at her queerly, and she felt herself blushing, though she tried to keep cool.

"You *know* you can drive. Why do you want more lessons?"

"Don't you *want* to give me any more?"

"You know I do! I want to give

you everything I've got." After a pause he reached over to where her hand lay on the wheel and touched her engagement ring. "When are you going to give that back?" he asked wistfully.

"I don't know," she replied in confusion, and amended hastily, amazed at herself. "I mean, I don't know that I am."

"Oh, dear," he said on a long sigh.

"Talking to me?" she chirped mischievously.

At that his arm went round her in a hard squeeze, but the car swerved so threateningly that he released her at once.

"I can't do two things at the same time," she remarked laughing to cover her agitation, for his touch had set her blood swirling.

"Shall I drive, then?" he offered audaciously.

"Not to-night!" she refused, remembering her last talk with Frank, and forced herself to add: "To-morrow we'll discuss getting the license."

"I can't come to-morrow night or the next night," he announced flatly.

She threw him a troubled look, wondering if he was angry with her for her changing moods. Or didn't he care to come? Was he just being sweet to her because he thought that was what she wanted?

He seemed to read part of her thought. "Really I can't come," he said earnestly. "But Thursday night—"

"Thursday night I have a date," she lied, in a pique. "So perhaps we'd better make this the last lesson."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw his scowl of indecision and continued teasingly: "You said I didn't need any more lessons, so why bother?"

"I can make it Wednesday night," he surrendered.

So they left it that way. Joyce, who wanted to get in as many lessons as she could before Frank returned, was disappointed at missing a night. The next day found her increasingly restless. She fretted at Frank's absence and at not knowing what it was all about.

But the minute she looked into Mac's eyes Wednesday night she knew it was Mac and not Frank she had wanted to see. The revelation came as a shock; it left her limp. She did not feel able even to drive.

"I'm tired, Mac," she begged off. "Will you drive for a while? We can go out in the country, and I'll drive back."

"Sure. You look tired," he commented, giving her a critical survey before which her eyes fell.

Neither spoke again until they were out of town, then Mac said persuasively: "Where's my kiss?"

"What makes you think you're going to get one?" she asked pertly, while her heart beat faster with desire. She felt suddenly as if she could not live through the evening if he did not kiss her.

He shrugged, but a moment later volunteered: "I cut night school to meet you, and I went without my dinner because I had to work later than usual."

"Then you certainly deserve a kiss."

Almost before the sentence was completed he had pulled over and stopped in a shadow at the roadside. She found herself turning to him hungrily, crowding into his arms, pressing her lips to his. The thought of Frank slipped further and further away. In the overpowering transport of the embrace she lost all sense of time or place.

Clinging madly to him, her lips answering the need of his, she knew she could meet his whole need as willingly.

"I love you!" he gasped. "I love you—better than anything in the world."

That brought her to her senses. "I—I'm sorry," she faltered, fighting against the spell of ecstasy which still bound her.

"Break your engagement!"

"What!"

"Can't you break your engagement?" he begged fervently. "I want you!"

"So does Frank."

"Which do you love?"

As he asked the question he put his hand under her chin and tilted her head so that he could look right into her eyes. She could not reply. If the rapture of the minutes before was love, she loved Mac, loved him with an abandon which she had never experienced with Frank. But she was engaged to Frank, and she had thought herself in love with him for so long that it was hard to doubt it now.

"Which do you love?" insisted Mac, his blue eyes burning into hers.

"I—don't—know," she confessed weakly.

"Then I have a chance?" His voice was deep with hope.

"I'll have to wait till Frank gets back," she said.

Perhaps when she saw Frank again—when he gave her his complete confidence—it would be different. She must not decide anything hastily. But, ah! The soul-satisfying, body-stirring rapture of Mac's embrace!

When they had become somewhat composed, and started on their way again, Joyce remembered his reference to night school.

"What did you mean?" she inquired with interest. "What are you studying? When did you start?"

"That's why I didn't want to meet you to-day—I don't like to miss—it isn't good. I'm taking some business courses—salesmanship and so forth. I started after that time when you said I didn't have to be a chauffeur always."

"Good for you! I'm so glad!"

"You know that auto store where I told you I go sometimes in the evenings to try to sell cars? The manager said the next opening he had for a salesman he'd try me."

"That's just splendid! But where are we anyway?" she asked, suddenly aware of their surroundings. "We've never been this far before."

"It's the shore road," he told her, dropping his voice. "I used to drive a truck across here. The place where the boats land is not far from the bottom of this hill."

They were going down a steep incline as he spoke. "The trucks drive without lights—it wouldn't be so good to meet one!" He pricked up his ears. "I bet that's one coming now," he whispered tensely.

Just then their car back-fired and it sounded so much like a shot that Joyce jumped nervously. But as she started to giggle at her mistake there was another report and something whistled by the car so close that it clipped the roof. At almost the same time a huge dark object loomed in the road ahead of them.

"Hold on—friends!" Mac shouted, stepping on the brake so suddenly that Joyce bounced forward to the windshield.

Their headlights now revealed a truck with four men jumping down from it. They approached, two on each side of the car, while Joyce shrank timidly against Mac.

"Get out," one of them commanded hoarsely.

"We're friends," Mac expostulated.

"Friends—hell! Hand over your iron."

"That wasn't a shot—it was backfire."

"Get out of that car—both of you!" growled the man. "We'll see what you got on you. Step in the light here where we can see you."

Mac got out and Joyce followed, clinging to his hand. They were searched hastily and so was the car.

"Thought you was the patrol," said the leader uneasily.

Mac looked from one to the other. "Any of you fellows know me?" he asked, and answered his own question, "Guess you came in after I left. I used to be in the racket—I know your boss. How about letting us go on? We're just"—he paused and winked broadly—"riding."

The fellow looked undecided. "Suppose you *are* a patrol? Or suppose you squeal?"

"Better let him tell his story to the boss," advised one of the others. "How do we know that he won't chase us with a whole gang if we let him go?"

The leader was impressed. "You take 'em in—keep 'em covered." Then to Mac and Joyce: "Get back in—make it snappy."

They obeyed and their escort settled in the back seat giving Mac a warning nudge between the shoulder blades with his revolver. Joyce cowered in her seat close to Mac so she could feel the security of his shoulder against hers. She was not exactly afraid, for she felt perfect confidence in his ability to take care of her. But the situation was far from comfortable!

"Where to?" said Mac cheerfully, giving her knee a reassuring pat.

"Straight ahead—then turn right."

"Ye-ah, I got you. Same old route."

It was not long before they were pulling up before a small house with just a shaft of light showing here and there beneath the drawn shades.

"It 'll be all 'right," Mac assured Joyce. "They know me here."

They were escorted through a side door and into a dimly lit room. Their guard ordered them back against the wall, then opened the door into the next room and motioned to some one within.

Mac had his arm around Joyce, who was unable to check her excited trembling, but when a man came forth from the other room he stepped forward expectantly. The newcomer grinned and gave him a hearty thump on the back.

"Coming back in the racket, are you?" he asked.

"I'm out of it for good, Sam!" Mac said, and explained the situation.

The man looked significantly at Joyce and asked, "Your skirt?"

Joyce dropped her eyes before the beseeching look Mac sent her. She felt a powerful impulse to step up and take his arm and admit that she was his "skirt," but resolutely she fought it down. She must be fair to Frank.

"We're free to go?" Mac inquired.

"Sure thing!" The man clapped him on the back again. "Want to take a bottle?"

"No, thanks."

As the door closed behind him Joyce heard some one in the room ask, "What was the noise out there?"

"Who's in there?" she queried sharply of Mac.

"The boss's right hand man," he replied, without meeting her eyes. "Came after I left. I know him by sight—but he doesn't know me. Why?"

"It sounded like—" she began, but could not make herself finish.

"Say!" He put his hands on her shoulders and looked intently down at her. "If you weren't engaged would you admit that you love me?"

"Ye-es." His imploring eyes forced the admission from her.

"But if I was still in this racket would you become engaged to me?"

She shook her head in negation. "I couldn't marry any one in this business."

"Then there's something I think you ought to know," he declared soberly.

Taking his hands from her shoulders he went to the door and flinging it open stepped aside so that she could have an unobstructed view into the other room.

She had been watching him in fascinated anticipation. As she saw the man sitting at the table she stood wild-eyed with horror for a moment, and then advanced resolutely. She knew now whom she loved, and was surprised that she had not been sure before.

"Joyce!" exclaimed the man in consternation, springing to his feet so hastily that he overturned his chair.

"So *this* is your business," she said scathingly. "No wonder you wouldn't tell me!"

"But Joyce—"

"You can say nothing I care to listen to," she broke in. "Here." She removed her ring and set it on the table before him as gingerly as if it were poisonous. "As long as I believed in you I expected to marry you and tried to persuade myself that I loved you. But now I know that I don't love you and I never did. I needed just this to make me see clearly."

"That man," Frank shouted in uncontrollable rage, pointing past her at Mac, "was in the racket, too. Sam just told me. But I suppose you love *him.*"

"He isn't in it any more," she replied proudly. "And he didn't pretend to be something that he wasn't. You are leading a double life—and you deliberately lied to me. I think I hate you!"

Before he could reply she turned to Mac and said clearly: "Take me home, dearest."

"If I find a street where there aren't many lights, will you kiss me?" teased Mac to the girl who snuggled in the curve of his arm, as he gave her another kiss. He had been kissing her most of the way home, driving slowly so that it could be done comfortably.

She smiled luxuriously and squirmed closer to him.

"There are no lights on the porch and it's quite dark in the corner of the swing," she stated, and added with a laugh: "And there won't be any one there to drive by and recognize our license number!"

"And it wouldn't matter now if they did!" he declared jubilantly. "But you haven't told me yet—do you love me?"

"Yes, I love you."

"You're sure you love me now?" he persisted, craving her assurance.

"Quite sure. I *always* loved you—only I didn't realize that it was love, because I was so bound by my engagement to Frank."

"And you don't regret—"

She slyly shoved his foot off the gas, and stepped on the brake. As the car came to a stop she flung both arms around his neck.

"Do I act as if I regretted anything?" she asked, shamelessly pulling his head down till she met his lips and once more lost herself in that sweet rapture.

"Those pearls you have just bought for a dime are real!"

Four Star Girl

By GLENDOLIN DAMON WAGNER

"HE'S got eyes of blue. I never cared for—'" The old song had been ringing in Nancy's mind all day long. She wriggled out of the shimmering, pearl-studded, cream satin dress, laid it carefully across a chair, and stood, head tilted, hands on slender hips, gazing down at it with wistful scorn. That bit of delicate loveliness represented hundreds of dollars—enough money to send father back to the famous New York oculist.

Oh, well! Nancy shrugged away her blues and hummed "That's my weakness now," as she slipped into her own five down and five a month ensemble, and pulled a floppy hat down over wavy, red-brown hair.

Some of those bored daughters of the rich who, from nine in the morning till five at night, gazed critically at Nancy as she posed before them on the revolving stage in one superb creation after another—some of those supercilious women with stark fear behind the hardness in their eyes, who murmured so glibly: "You may send this—and this—" would have given a fortune for the wealth of rippling hair under the floppy hat, for the clear, pink and white skin, and for the sweet, wide, red, laughing mouth.

Nancy, at the mirror, powder puff and lip stick in hand, flung over her shoulder:

"No kidding, girls, my sheik's got to have eyes of blue."

In the confusion of the big dressing room with its littered finery—fur-edged, gold embroidered evening wraps, gold and silver slippers, gowns of satins and velvets, scented, pastel-tinted negligees — girls scampered about, glad that the day was over, in a hurry to get out onto the street and freedom.

One of them, pulling on a stocking, answered:

"Say, Nancy, you should worry about his eyes! Find me a daddy with a million dollars and I'll go color blind."

"But," confessed Nancy, with shy defiance, "I—I—believe in love."

The girls hooted. One of them murmured: "Can you imagine! She believes in love!" Nancy, laughing, cried: "Good night!" and sped onto the street. She was late. Poor dad would be starved, and lonely.

Now, let's see! What might he like for dinner to-night? Pork chops? But, no. They'd had pork chops yesterday. Breaded veal? Expensive, rather, but father liked veal.

Busy with her thoughts, Nancy hummed: "He's got curly hair," and wondered why that woman smiled as she passed. Often Nancy, rushing to and from work, through crowded streets, wondered why so many people vouchsafed her a fleeting smile, never guessing that her own happy face inspired those friendly glances.

For Nancy was happy, in spite of a very genuine anxiety over her father.

At nineteen, when a girl is pretty, so pretty that the eyes of men, everywhere, pay tribute to her beauty, when the infinite possibilities of life lie all before her, tingling at her finger tips, sparkling at the eyes, setting light feet to dancing with the zest of youth, a girl, surely, may be excused for smiling as she hurries along.

IN front of the ten-cent store, reeking with its tense, perspiring, last-minute shoppers, Nancy paused, hesitated, then walked in. Just for a string of pearl beads. She'd wear them with her new tan ensemble to the movie to-night. Not because of Herman, for he wasn't worth any effort, but simply because it was a joy to look well at all times.

Herman! Nancy sighed. If only she could like him better, or if father didn't like him so much, or if he hadn't been so kind—really, so very kind—in loaning them that money after father's sight began to fail. Father hoped she would marry Herman, but father's dim eyes couldn't see the horror of the smirking mouth, or the sensuous greed that sometimes leaped into the sly, restless eyes.

At the jewelry counter Nancy selected a string of pearls longer than any of the others which seemed particularly lustrous, and handed it, with a dime, to the waiting clerk.

And then, in the midst of the jostling crowd, she felt fingers gripping her arm. "Listen, lady!" An agitated voice, low, urgent, was whispering close to her ear.

She turned sharply, raised her indignant eyes to meet anxious, brown ones looking pleadingly into hers. A tall, slim young man, breathing heavily, was bending over her.

"S-a-y!" she began haughtily, "how do you get that way? You—"

The young man seemed desperate. "Listen, please," he interrupted, "those pearls—you just bought—are genuine. They're worth oodles of money. I'm—"

"Really?" Nancy gave him an up-

ward glance of amusement. "And now I'll tell one."

"Oh, please believe me! I'm in a dickens of a fix." Very earnest were the brown eyes. "See that cop? Standing by the candy counter? He—he followed me in here. He thinks I stole those pearls. I didn't. Honest! All I want is time to explain. But he won't let me explain. He's going to take me to jail. And I—" the young man paused, breathless, and smiled down at Nancy, such a whimsical, beseeching, little boy smile, that she decided, very suddenly, that he must not go to jail.

She frowned thoughtfully. "But what can I do?"

"Gee! I don't know. He's been chasing me all over town, and," the dark eyes danced, "the way I've been running is nobody's business. He's glaring at me now, but he isn't dead sure of me. All he's ever seen of me is my back. Say! Gosh!"

That last was an indignant remonstrance. The officer's hand had closed over the young man's arm, and his gruff voice was demanding: "Come along! You!"

"Me?" inquired the young man with injured innocence.

Nancy was thrilled. What a perfectly gorgeous adventure to relate to the girls at the store! Taking the envelope containing the pearls from the clerk she slipped it into her purse and turned to the officer. "I—beg—your—pardon!" None of her most supercilious customers could have done it better.

The perspiring policeman had evidently also been running "like nobody's business." Ignoring the disdainful little lady, he repeated: "Come along! You thief! And bring those pearls."

"Thief!" echoed Nancy. "Pearls? What pearls?"

"Yes," the young man demanded, "what pearls?"

"The pearls you snatched from that woman's neck. The pearls you've been running all over town with. I arrest you for—"

"'Running!'" Nancy laughed lightly. "Really, officer, this is amusing. This gentleman, my brother, Tom, can't run, for he—he's lame. Oh, very lame. He—you see—he limps. And—and, so, you see, he can't run. And he's been shopping with me all afternoon. He's had no time to steal pearls. And, besides—" The girl tilted her small head proudly, and said with all the dignity of a queen announcing her identity: "I—I am—Nancy Moore."

Moore. Nancy Moore. Now, who the— The officer frowned and scratched his head. The Moores must be people of importance. Somewhere down the line the real thief had given him the slip. "Humph!" he conceded, belligerently, "my mistake."

IT was thus that Nancy Moore and Tim Gilbert met. Not that the manner of their meeting meant much to either of them, since both were joyously convinced that they had been born just for each other. One first glance into the dancing, golden-brown eyes told Nancy that here was the man fate meant for her, the man for whom she had waited, of whom she had dreamed.

And Tim was so busy falling in love with the vivid face under the black hat that he couldn't consider details of eyes or hair. He knew her eyes were doing things to him. Pretty? He didn't debate the question. For she was just—his girl. Out of a world of girls—his own girl.

He bent over her eagerly, frank admiration in his gaze. "Gee!" he exclaimed. "You were great! You—you're a wonderful girl. You're a four-star girl."

Nancy smiled demurely. "Says you?" she inquired, with a shy, twinkling, upward glance.

"Says I!" Tim's tone was emphatic. He asked her to go to dinner with him, but Nancy must go home and get dinner for father. Tim's eyes glowed. A modern girl refusing a dinner invitation to go home to her father!

"But I must see you again," he urged. "I must explain about those pearls. I must—"

Nancy's eyes deepened with earnestness, became velvety soft. "You don't have to explain," she said simply, "because I—I—just know."

Tim's voice was husky. "Thanks, wonderful girl. And when may I see you again? How about—"

"How about," finished impulsive Nancy, breathlessly, "having dinner with father and me, to-night?"

"Why, gosh! May I, really? Why—!"

They talked very fast on the way to Nancy's home in the taxi, for there were all those empty, meaningless years before they met to make up for. Tim explained his possession of the pearls. He had seen a man snatch them from a woman's neck and start to run. Tim had sprung forward, grabbed the thief, snatched the jewels, but the man managed to wriggle from his clutch and sprint down an alley.

The woman, turning, saw Tim with her pearls. She yelled "Thief! Police!" A crowd gathered. Tim tried to explain. She continued to yell. Two officers were approaching at a run. So Tim, still clutching the pearls, did a most foolish and natural thing. He dodged and ran, as fast as his long legs could carry him. He dashed into an open door, finally, saw a counter piled with strings of pearl beads, and, under the spur of excitement, placed his beside them.

"And then," laughed Nancy, "I came in and bought them for ten cents. Now we'll mail them to police headquarters, and that's that."

"Yes," agreed Tim gravely, "that's that, if you believe me. Because what you think of me means everything in the world."

During that all too short ride it seemed natural for Nancy to be telling him of the thing nearest her heart. How her father was threatened with blindness unless he got money, somehow, to take him to the famous eye specialist in New York. And how, fighting against stabbing headaches and that insidious film, he was straining his eyes to complete plans for the new home the Elks Lodge proposed to erect. The Elks were stimulating competition by their offer of ten thousand dollars in cash for the winning plans.

"The contest closes to-morrow night at midnight," Nancy said, "but father is clinging to his drawings till the last minute. He revises and studies and adds."

"Say!" cried Tim, delightedly. "This is interesting." He had been sitting sideways, gazing intently down into the pretty face, watching for the vagrant dimple which did, sometimes, appear at one corner of the mouth. "I'm an architect, too, or mean to be. Working for Upton Ries now. Gee! I hope your father wins. I do, really, although Mr. Ries has submitted plans, too. But that is tough about your father."

Nancy shuddered. "Yes, that awful, empty darkness he's facing so bravely—"

And the two, excited, radiant, standing on the very edge of romance and love, spared a sober moment for an old, lonely man's grim battle.

To have him here in her own home, to cook for, to—

TO Tim, as Nancy introduced them, Mr. Moore seemed a fine man, with a scholarly face and stately graciousness of manner. There was aching pathos in the intense way he bent over his drawings, putting last touches here and there.

For he was an artist. A rapid survey of the plans convinced Tim of that, and the two were soon deep in discussion.

Nancy, busy in the kitchenette, saw the two heads bent over the desk, the beloved white head, and the sleek, black, young head, and smiled tremulously at the warm surge of bliss rising from her heart. She wasn't in love, of course. Why, she couldn't be, with a man she had met just two hours before! But to have him here, in her home, talking to her father, an intimate part of the family life, while she

cooked for the two, her men folks, seemed, somehow, very satisfying.

A veritable heaven of joy, with the gates miraculously flung wide—and into that heaven walked Herman.

He entered noisily, flinging the door open with a bang, and stopping just inside, in his pose of genial, hail fellow well met, rubbing his hands together with quick, nervous movements, and smiling.

"Well! Hello, everybody. In time for dinner, I see."

He was a short, thin, wiry man, with small, restless eyes, a perpetual smile, and motions that were jerkily self-conscious. He walked with quick, pattering steps, holding his head high in an instinctive attempt to increase the impression of height.

"Oh, hello, Herman," said Nancy. In her voice was unflattering dismay. She was thinking, rebelliously, unreasonably: "Why did he have to come to-night? Why did he?" For she had completely forgotten her promise to go to the show with him. Everything connected with Herman seemed, strangely, very far in the past. She had been born anew to-night.

Their pleasant evening was spoiled. Herman resented Tim's presence, hating him with the hatred of the small man for one of splendid physique.

And Tim, at the door, after Herman had chattered energetically through an interminable evening, taking Nancy's outstretched hand, looking down into her eyes, said gravely: "You're a four-star girl, all right. And this 'll be a four-star day in my life. You're wonderful, Nancy. You're— Well, good night, Nancy."

"Tim—! I'll see you again?" She couldn't let him go. She couldn't let things—just end.

"You want to?" He bent over her, his sober face alight with eagerness. "You aren't kidding me?"

"I'm not kidding you, Tim."

"But," insisted Tim savagely, "that little individual strung with charged wires—has he got a stand-in here? I've been jealous as the devil all evening."

"No, Tim. Father likes him. Father would be glad, I think, if I— But he hasn't got a stand-in with me, Tim. Hush, he's listening!"

Tim pulled her out into the dimly lighted hall and shut the door behind them. He cupped her two hands in his and held them to his lips. He laughed unsteadily. "I guess—" His voice was husky, "I guess you'll think I'm crazy. I guess I am—with love for you. Nancy, I love you. I'm just as sure as though I'd known you a million years. It was fate that sent you to buy a string of pearls to-day. Nancy, I'm going to teach you how to love."

She put her fingers over his lips. She raised her eyes to his, soft and dark with the intensity of her emotion. "You won't need to, Tim. I know how. I learned—to-day."

"*Nancy!*" Into the word he put an incredulous prayer of thanksgiving. And then his arms were around her, drawing her close to him. His lips touched hers. She closed her eyes, sank deep down into engulfing waves of bliss.

"Nancy," eagerly, "we'll be married at once?"

Then Nancy drew away from him, shook her head soberly. "Not yet, Tim. Not till father's fate is decided. He'll submit the plans to-morrow. Within a week we'll know the decision of the judges. If he wins we'll get married, Tim, and go to New York with him. But, if he fails—well, I must stay with him in the darkness."

"Oh, he'll win," declared Tim. "His work is beautiful. As an architect he's got Ries beat a mile. But, Nancy, just supposing he doesn't win, everything 'll still be O. K. If your father fails, Ries has a cinch, and I'll be made junior partner, with a pretty fair salary, and your father can live with us. I can take care of both of you, darling."

"No, Tim. Father's proud. To be blind and dependent upon the fruits of his competitor's success — that would kill him. We'll just wait and hope—"

"And," Tim finished, softly, "love."

Nancy reëntered the room to find that her father had gone to bed, leaving her alone with Herman. The man, glancing shrewdly at the shining rapture glorifying the girl's face, put rudely possessive hands on her shoulders.

"Where'd you pick him up?" he asked angrily. "Who is he?"

Nancy shrank from him. Her happiness was, as yet, too beautiful to bear the brunt of words.

"Listen here!" Herman persisted, "He's a stranger, isn't he? You don't know a thing about him, do you? He tells you he works for Upton Ries, architect. And yet your father's nut enough to show him his plans for the Elks' building. Maybe Ries sent him here as a spy."

"You're crazy, Herman," Nancy scoffed.

"Nancy!" Herman became abject, adopted a wheedling tone. "You aren't turning me down for him, are you? I've been a good friend, loaned your father money when his eyes first went bad, got you your job. I'm nuts about you, kid. I'm on the level with you, too. I'll marry you, and—"

"Really!" Nancy's red lips curled contemptuously.

Into Herman's little, glittering eyes leaped that sensuous greed she feared and loathed. "Now you listen to me!" He stepped close to her. He spoke with slow emphasis. "I haven't been loaning your father money just for charity. It's because I want you. And what I want I get. See?"

Nancy put her two hands on his chest and pushed him from her with a gesture of repugnance. "Go home, Herman. I—I'm tired."

"Oh, yeah? You were peppy enough until that guy left. Well, I'll go; but I'll come back again—and again— Because, Nancy, you're mine, and that guy Gilbert 'll never get you."

That night Nancy cuddled down into bed, wakeful, happy, reveling in the memories of joyous moments; of brown eyes, tender, mischievous, and of ardent lips upon her lips. She would see him again to-morrow. Never before had she known what it meant to live.

But her last waking thought was of Herman and his sinister: "I'll come again—and again. Gilbert 'll never get you. Never!"

THE Elks were making a gala event of the laying of the corner stone for their Lodge Hall. The day was beautiful, with a cool breeze, a clear sky, and no hint of rain. The site was gay with fluttering flags and colored balloons, a bunting-draped platform, and people in holiday attire.

Nancy had the afternoon off. In her new ensemble, with a fuzzy tan béret, Tim and Herman glaring speechless enmity at each other over her head, she was in a pretty fever of impatience to start, but must listen to her father's repeated injunctions.

He was intrusting her with those plans of his to be taken to the Elks

Lodge office and delivered to the chairman of the building committee, and his white, blue-veined hands fingered the rubber-banded envelope lovingly while his voice faltered as he relinquished to her care his destiny.

"Be careful, Nancy," he urged, for the twentieth time. "Put them where you won't lose them, and see that they get to the proper person."

Herman's hand went out. "I'll—" he began.

But Tim was quicker. Nancy's fiancé deemed it his duty and his pleasure to take charge of all she held dear. "I'll put them in here, Mr. Moore. See?" And he slipped the long white envelope, bound with its rubber band, down into the inside pocket of his coat and buttoned it up. "Now your papers are safe. They can't possibly get out of my pocket unless some one takes them out."

As the three hurried down the street, Nancy in the middle, the band music floated faintly to them. The program had evidently begun, so, instead of stopping at the Elks' headquarters as they had meant to do, they hurried on. The drawings, quite safe in Tim's pocket, could just as well be left after the dedication ceremonies. They had until midnight to submit them.

And then, as they were rushing breathlessly along, a small, malicious cloud in the clear sky sent wicked drops of rain down upon them—a deluge of big, pelting drops. "Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Tim, with a concerned glance at Nancy's pretty outfit. "Say, Ries's office is only half a block away. I'll just dash up and get my umbrella."

Herman, hand extended, poohed the idea of rain, declaring it would be over before Tim could get to the office and back. Nancy, laughing, dancing about on impatient feet, said she'd rather be wet than late. But Tim sprinted down the street and disappeared in a doorway, to return almost instantly, breathless, but bending down to look his love into Nancy's face as he held the umbrella over her.

And, as suddenly as it had begun, the pattering shower ceased!

"What did I tell you!" muttered Herman.

When they arrived the band concert was over and the speech of dedication begun. No matter. Nancy's whole body was pulsing with this strange happiness, almost too tumultuous to be borne. Here, close beside her, so close that sometimes the backs of their hands touched, was Tim, her Tim—her man. And soon, surely, on this bare patch of ground would be erected a building which would be adequate expression of her father's gesture toward lasting beauty.

What a day! Oh, what a day!

UP in front camera men were taking pictures of the crowd. Nancy was inspired with the notion of getting in the very front row. "I've always wanted to be in the movies," she declared merrily, "and now's my chance."

So, with Tim and Herman following as best they could, Nancy began her difficult progress through the perspiring crowd. Until, with one final spurt of effort, she reached her goal, directly in front of the camera's eye.

Somewhere behind her in the sea of humanity Herman had vanished. Presently Tim reached her side, while the crowd, hearing no word of the speech, become a sweating mass, ebbed closer and closer, pressing, jostling, elbowing, pushing. All about them were

murmurs and squeals of protest: "Oh, quit pushing, brother." "Say, you, get off my foot!" "Oh, this is terrible!"

Nancy seemed very small and childish and helpless as she was swayed this way and that, and Tim slipped an arm over her shoulders, between her and the milling mob. At that possessive, protective touch of his arm, with its warmth and strength, delicious little thrills of joy went tingling through Nancy's being. Smiling, she glanced up into Tim's face. He was bending over her, smiling, too, and, at the propitious moment the camera clicked.

Tim's eyes danced with mischief. He whispered, teasingly, "A regular honeymoon picture, darling."

Then it was all over. While the band blared forth "The Stars and Stripes Forever," the crowd dispersed with astonishing ease, and Herman sprang into existence at Nancy's side. He was smiling and rubbing his hands together in his nervous, fussy way.

"Well, better hurry, hadn't we, with Mr. Moore's papers?" He turned to Tim. "I suppose you still have them?"

"Naturally." Tim's tone was sarcastic. "You saw me button them inside my coat. They couldn't get out."

"Oh, no. Of course not," Herman agreed, cheerfully.

But sometime during the afternoon they did get out, no one could say how nor when. At the Elks' office Tim stepped up to the man who acknowledged himself to be chairman. "Mr. Moore asked us to leave these papers. They are plans he is submitting for—"

"Yes, to-morrow will be my wedding day—if you'll have me!"

As Tim talked he unbuttoned his coat and thrust his hand into the inside pocket. His words trailed off into a stunned silence.

Tim's hand continued to fumble at the empty pocket, dazed. And then the full force of the disaster crashing upon him, he turned, instinctively, to Nancy. "They're gone, Nancy," he gasped wildly. "The papers are gone!"

Nancy had been standing still, a cold hand seeming to clutch her heart. She smiled, a dreary, tired, foolish smile. "Not gone, Tim? You can't mean *gone?*"

"They—they—aren't here," Tim stuttered. "They—they're lost. But I—you saw me—I put them into my pocket—deep down."

"Oh, yes," Herman responded, smoothly, "you did."

"Tim—?" Nancy's eyes were wide with horror. "Father's plans—"

For weeks his white head had been bent patiently over them, while he had fought against stabbing headaches and dizziness and dimmed vision. With infinite attention to every detail he had perfected them and had entrusted them to her; and Tim, her lover, whom she had known but a few hours, had lost them.

But how could they be lost? How could they have slipped from Tim's pocket? They couldn't. Nancy knew that they couldn't.

"Some one," said Tim hoarsely, "stole them."

"Stole them!" Herman mocked. "Apple sauce! It would be absolutely impossible for a hand to get down inside your coat pocket without your knowing it."

"Then how," questioned Tim, white-faced, "do you account—?"

"That," said Herman, with an ugly smile, "is up to you."

In their distress they went back to the park, desolate now, with its trampled suggestions of past gayeties. Carefully they searched every foot of the ground, examined every fluttering bit of paper, but with a hope stillborn. The envelope of papers was not there. They had known all the time that it would not be there.

Finally, in a dull voice, Nancy said: "We'll go home and tell father." Suddenly, in her unbearable misery, she whirled upon Tim, clutched his arm, looked up into his face, pleaded with him to make what had happened not true. "Tim! Tim! What will you say?"

He gazed down into her eyes, read there something of the despair that was torturing her and his face went white. "Nancy!" His eyes were steady, his voice firm. "I know that I put the papers in my pocket and that they're not there now. Some one took them out, but that some one was not I."

The loss of the papers was a tragedy, but, for him and for her, there lurked another tragedy which they shrank from facing.

TIM told Mr. Moore the little he knew. He expressed his deep regret and concern, feeling, all the time, how inadequate were his words. "To say that I'm sorry—" he faltered.

Herman interrupted, deliberately shouldering in front of Tim, between him and Mr. Moore, in his very swagger something of insult.

"Mr. Moore!" Herman talked fast, with an air of importance. "I challenge Tim Gilbert to prove that I lie when I accuse him of stealing the papers and turning them over to his employer, Mr. Upton Ries, an architect."

"You lie!" Tim towered over the little man, fingers working convulsively, eyes flashing.

"Then prove that I lie," suggested Herman complacently. "Prove that you didn't leave the papers in Mr. Ries's office when you insisted upon going up there for an umbrella we told you we didn't need. You've said right along that Mr. Moore's plans were the best. Prove that Mr. Ries didn't hire you to mislay those plans until after midnight to-night."

Tim's answer hung for a moment. He had been put on trial with these three his judges. His eyes sought Nancy. But she had drifted over to a window and stood, head bent, her back to the room. Mr. Moore, seated at his desk, was waiting for Tim's reply. Tim faced him squarely.

"Mr. Moore, Herman's statements are true, but the insinuations back of the statements are vile lies. One can fight facts, but it's hard to fight insinuations. I did not steal your papers, and I do not know what became of them, but I'm going to find out. Nancy."

The girl turned, came slowly across the room to stand beside her father, one hand on his shoulder. "Yes?"

"Nancy, I'm not a thief. You don't—you can't—believe that."

Thief! It was as a fugitive, accused of theft, fleeing from the law, that she had first met him. Quite without volition thoughts, memories, suspicions were formulating in her brain. Tim had told her that her father's plans were good, so good that, in his opinion, Mr. Ries didn't stand a chance. But Tim had told her that if Mr. Ries did win he would become junior partner. What else did she know of him? Nothing save what his eyes had told her, and eyes can lie.

She looked up into Tim's face, into his boy's frank, pleading eyes, and saw there nothing but baffled hurt and love. Plainly they were saying, those eyes: "Nancy, you're hurting me. I love you."

But eyes can lie.

Mr. Moore broke the tense silence. He was pulling open a drawer of the desk. "Of course," he spoke with an old man's slow deliberation, "of course I wasn't so foolish as to trust all my chances to one set of drawings. I have a copy here. There's plenty of time—"

Tim sprang forward. "Oh, by jinks! I'm glad." His face was all aglow with relief. He reached out a hand. "I'll just dash down to the office with them, Mr. Moore. I'll—"

Nancy's small hand interposed. Deliberately she took the envelope, and, looking straight ahead, walked directly past Tim to Herman.

"Please," she said, "take these down at once, Herman."

Tim's eyes flashed. His lips tightened into a hard line. "Nancy," he said, "some day I'm going to prove that you've wronged me."

Left alone with her father, Nancy threw herself into the old man's arms, tightening her own, convulsively, about his neck.

"Father," she sobbed, "I love him, and I've driven him away, and I can't go on living without him!"

IT was no difficult trick for Nancy in the empty days that followed, to assume that expression of bored hauteur deemed an essential qualification of the professional model. As she trailed beautiful gowns over carpeted floors or posed weary hours on the revolving platform, her blue eyes, hard and tired now, gazed blankly over the

heads of her patrons. At nineteen everything that mattered, it seemed—love, faith, happiness—had been stolen from her.

Because nothing mattered, and because she felt a terror of ever being alone with her thoughts, she said "Yes," when Herman asked her, once more, to marry him.

Why not Herman, whom her father liked, and who had proven himself so stanch a friend? Listlessly she consented when he urged an early marriage. Marriage, perhaps, would prove an armor against this unbearable hurt—this desolation.

That first joyous outpouring of her love and trust was counterbalanced, now, by an equally intense anger and resentment. Tim should not have come into her life to hurt her and leave her.

And so, when the news came that Mr. Moore's plans had been accepted, and, with the news, a check for ten thousand dollars, and he decided to leave at once for New York, it seemed the natural thing for Herman and Nancy to be married and accompany him. "At once!" That meant to-morrow.

In spite of herself something within the girl recoiled at the thought—something she had believed dead.

That night she drifted into her father's room to perch on the arm of his chair and drop her head on his shoulder.

He stroked her soft, rippling hair. "Well, Nancy," he sighed happily, "this time next week your old dad's eyes will be as good as new again. And this time to-morrow my little girl will be 'Mrs. Nancy Swank.' Seems almost too good to be true, doesn't it?"

The girl controlled a shudder. "Yes, father." Nothing must be permitted to cloud the brightness of his joy. Tears crept from between her tightly shut eyes. "Mrs. Herman Swank!" If only Herman didn't chatter so much! If only that wiry, dapper little body of his would, for one moment, be quiet. If only he didn't continually run out his tongue to moisten his lips, like—like a greedy cat! Oh, if only—if only—he weren't Herman!

Nancy kissed her father, whispered: "Good night," and sped up to her room. She closed the door, shutting herself in with her aching loneliness. Slowly she went to the telephone, took the receiver off the hook, and, holding it up to her ear, pretended to call a number, as she had so many, many times during the past week. Ardently she longed to hear Tim's voice again. Just once again to hear that deep, tender "Nancy." Then, she felt, she could bear to go on.

But she replaced the receiver and went to the window to stare out into the darkness with tear-blinded, unseeing eyes.

At this time to-morrow, she thought, the doors would be closed forever between her and Tim. But surely she didn't care, for Tim was a thief. He had tried to rob her poor, blind father.

Still, one might talk, just for a moment, even to a thief. One might, at least, say "Good-by," when the parting was to be forever. "Till death do you part." Those words, to-morrow, would close the door between Tim and herself. Those words, too, would surely still this gnawing, lonely ache, and wipe out the memory of brown eyes that danced and pleaded and loved and reproached.

Supposing she called Tim now and said to him: "Tim, I love you. No matter what you are or what you've done to me, I love you. I'm going to

be married to-morrow, but I love you." Supposing . . .

SHE sat down at the telephone to her dreary little game of make-believe, feeling, somehow, that its nearness brought Tim nearer to her. And, while she sat there the telephone rang. Trembling, she took down the receiver, breathed a faint "Hello!"

There came a quavering, breathless, excited: "Hello, Nancy." Tim's voice. She had known it would be Tim. "Nancy, sweetheart! Listen! I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, Tim."

"I want you to go to a movie with me to-night."

Quick anger blazed within her. A movie to-night! What an anticlimax! Tim, on this last night, suggesting so paltry, so commonplace a thing as going to a movie!

"Do you realize," she said icily, "that it's after midnight, and that—"

"I know! I know!" His stammering voice was urgently incoherent. "I—I'll come for you in a taxi. I'll—"

"And do you realize," Nancy went on as though he had not spoken, "that I'm to be married to-morrow?"

"I know that. I've heard. I'll be there in five minutes, Nancy."

The receiver clicked its finality into her ear.

She stole quietly out onto the porch, and when the taxi stopped in front she got in without a word. She was shaking with nervous excitement.

Tim only said, in that strange, tense voice, "Good of you to come, Nancy. I knew you would."

"Tim, I don't understand—"

"Just a hunch, Nancy. It came to me suddenly to-night, when I heard that you—that you were going—away. I've gone half crazy this last week, since the papers were stolen — thinking—wondering— This hunch may be nothing, but"—his voice faltered, deepened, went on—"but I'll always remember that you did come to-night, wonderful girl, four-star girl. You did give me a chance."

The taxi had taken them over to the slum part of town and was stopping now in front of a shabby motion picture house.

They went in and took seats halfway down the big, dark, almost empty room. In the silence Nancy could hear Tim breathing, loud, like a runner almost exhausted.

On the screen a news reel was just ending. It was followed by a comedy. Tim muttered: "Damn!" Nancy's nerves were on edge. To sit through an inane pie-throwing contest, on this night, was little less than torture. She half rose. "Really, Tim—"

But he clutched her wrist. "Wait," he begged hoarsely.

She could feel the tautness of his body close to hers. His nervous fingers, as though he were unconscious of the act, were still over Nancy's wrist.

"In just a minute," he whispered. And then: "Now! Look!"

Nancy did look, and saw a bunting-draped stage, and below it upturned faces, a crowd of people. A succession of views were flashed from various angles, of the same laughing, pushing crowd. She began to understand. This was a reproduction of the dedication ceremonies on that memorable day—years and years, or was it only a week ago?—when her father's papers had been lost.

And there was herself, in the front row, a laughing, radiantly happy girl, looking up into Tim's face, with his arm over her shoulder. Was this why he had brought her here, on this last

night, just to taunt her with bittersweet memories? It was ruthless cruelty.

"I'm going home," she said angrily. This time Tim made no effort to detain her.

"I guess," he assented, rising to follow her, "we might as well. My hunch went fluey. But— *Nancy!*"

He seized her arm, drew her back. "Nancy! Look! Slow motions!"

Nancy flung over her shoulder a disdainful: "What of it?"

"Wait! There's a chance yet," Tim declared.

Again, on the screen, Nancy saw that crowd of perspiring, jostling, milling people, but in slow motion this time, with every movement, every slightest gesture ludicrously exaggerated. Again she saw herself in the front row, her head turning slowly, slowly, up toward Tim. Tim's arm was creeping over her shoulder, between her and that mob which was elbowing and shoving her this way and that. Tim was looking down, laughing, into her upturned face, saying something to her.

And then, quite plainly, she saw some one—a man—edge his way close to Tim. It was Herman, and there was a strange, sly smile on his lips. So slowly that one could not mistake the action, his hand crept over Tim's shoulder, down inside his coat, and up again, in it a long, white envelope, rubber bound.

Herman had stolen her father's papers!

It had happened in that moment, prolonged by the slow camera, when Tim, so pushed about by the people that one more slight touch on his shoulder had passed unnoticed, was bending over her, smiling merrily into her upturned face.

Nancy, in the gloom of the motion picture house, put an imploring hand on Tim's arm. "Can you ever forgive me, Tim?"

Tim's arms were around her, drawing her close, while he whispered exultantly: "And to-morrow was to have been your wedding day."

"To-morrow," Nancy declared, "will be my wedding day, unless—unless—there is some reason why you can't—"

Tim could think of no reason.

LOVE

FASHIONED of fear and fancies,
With gladness and sorrow rife;
The learning of self forgetting,
The hope and the heart of life.

—Grace Jones Brennan

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found on page 305. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

November 15—Good till mid-afternoon; then generally neutral.

November 16—Take no chances to-day; avoid danger in afternoon and evening.

November 17—Hold back on financial affairs; a routine day.

November 18—Favorable for all honorable projects.

November 19—Continuing favorable till late afternoon; then average.

November 20—Do not travel; avoid important decisions; don't write.

November 21—Better in the morning than during balance of day.

November 22—A good day; get things done; make it count.

November 23—Good in the morning; but make no new moves thereafter.

November 24—Travel and make decisions in morning; then routine.

November 25—Not good with old people and old matters; otherwise O. K.

November 26—Act and decide in the morning; rest and play thereafter.

November 27—A good day; observe the holiday in a humble spirit.

November 28—Generally adverse influences to-day; take no chances.

PERSONAL INFLUENCES

People born December 29 to January 3 are now under somewhat depressing vibrations and should be particularly careful in all dealings with superiors; women of these dates are apt to be having difficulties with men in close relationship. Those born March 30 to April 3 should be prepared for rapid changes in occupation and mental

point of view; women of these dates are apt to be very dissatisfied with men in some way.

Opportunity for advancement and financial expansion now to be embraced by natives of July 10 to 15. Those born August 3 to 9 are probably very enthusiastic now, some of them being inclined to take too many chances; hold back and avoid risks. Natives of August 29 to September 1 would now do well to keep out of all types of emotional trouble, in both business and domestic affairs.

Those born in the latter half of November and during the first three weeks of December are under excellent stimulations for the last half of this month and should make it their business to embrace the opportunities that come their way, mentally, emotionally and with superiors.

IF HE HAD ONLY KNOWN

This is the true story of a famous movie star.

On the first day of January, 1924, he sat in his own apartment, owned in a coöperative building, looking out over beautiful Central Park, New York City. He reached into his pocket and took out his check book. The balance in his favor was more than a million dollars to his credit.

He had everything he had ever desired in life. At his side was his loving wife. Both of them were healthy and full of the joy of living.

He was a tremendous success. His pictures were in every movie house in the United States and Europe. The papers were full of his story, telling how he had risen from obscurity by sheer personal merit and hard work. No one begrudged him a nickel of his fortune or a moment of his happiness.

One year later.

On January 1, 1925, this same man was living in a rented bungalow in the cheaper section of Hollywood. There was nothing left of the million that had been his. Even his car was gone; he had to take a market basket on his arm and pay cash for what he bought at the grocery store. No store would deliver to his house and no one would give him credit. All his former prosperity was washed away. He was Hollywood's most conspicuous failure.

The man I am talking about is Charley Ray, born March 15, 1891, 8.41 P.M., in Jacksonville, Illinois.

The thing that hit him in 1924, astrologically speaking, was the conjunction transit of the planet Uranus, which continued to hover around his Sun degree all through 1925 and 1926 as well.

At the beginning of 1924, as I said, he had everything he had ever desired in life. But the trouble started when he began to want more. He looked around for more worlds to conquer and decided he should produce his own pictures, instead of continuing to work for a handsome salary under the banner of those who had been producing his work in the past. He felt within him that independent spirit that is always conferred by the transit of Uranus, and he proceeded to do things that were extremely ill advised.

The picture he made with his own money was "The Courtship of Miles Standish," and the newspapers printed as the reason for its failure the fact that the public wasn't interested in costume plays. But that was not the real reason for Charley's flop.

Did you see that picture? No, I don't think you did. I know I didn't, even though I wanted to. But, try as I would, I couldn't find a theater where it was being shown. That was the real trouble. Charley had defied the distributors, feeling as he did under the ray of Uranus that he didn't need the help of any one—he could swing the whole thing all by himself. He felt himself able to produce, act in and distribute that picture all alone. As a result, the usual channels for getting a picture before the public were closed to him. Even if you have the best picture in the world, you can't make a nickel on it unless Mr. and Mrs. Public have a chance to step up to the box office window and pay their cash for admission.

That's why Charley Ray failed, temporarily. He let Uranus get away with him. He lost all sense of proportion and didn't practice sufficient self-control. He allowed himself to get a Napoleon complex. Remember what happened to Napoleon. No man can get along in this world without coöperation; he must give and receive help all the way if he would be a true success.

At the same time, while Uranus was in Pisces, the sign in which Charley Ray was born, this planet mowed down a great many of the old favorites. Here is a partial list of actors and actresses who were going strong before Uranus landed on them—where are they now? Hope Hampton, B. P. Fineman, the director, Helen Jerome Eddy, Earle Williams, Pearl White, Edwin Carewe, Stuart Holmes, Leslie Fenton, Mrs. Dorothy Reid (the great Wally's wife), Dorothy Davenport, Syd Chaplin, Diana Miller.

It wasn't old age that overcame any of the actors who were famous then and who are forgotten by many to-day. No. Among those I have just mentioned are some who were born as late as 1902; and we are at present paying our respects to numerous actors and actresses who were born before 1885. So it isn't age that pulls the curtain on a favorite.

What is it?

It is the way they take the planetary influences —whether they proceed without any knowledge of the changes that are going on inside them, following blindly the direction indicated by a stellar ray.

On the other hand, I could name a few natives

of Pisces who were in the movies then and still are because they resisted the negative side of the Uranian influence when it struck them. But they all felt it, you may be assured of that. I have personally talked to many, such as Harrison Ford, Henry B. Walthall and others, all of whom have told me the inside story of what they were going through at that time.

There ought to be a big lesson in this for those who are now going through the same thing, and I hope they heed my advice to coöperate with others and allow others to coöperate with them. Those to whom I refer are the people born during the last week of March and the first week of April, all of whom are under the mental tests suggested in this story—and they will be during the remainder of 1930 and during most of 1931.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

My goodness! But you do keep me busy looking up your prospects in marriage. It's O. K. with me. I know how important it is, and I am glad to be of service. Hope you really pay attention to what I say.

Remember, the month and year given here after your birthday is the *next* good time for you to make a decision as to whether you are really in love and should marry. I can't make it any sooner for any of you.

Here's the bunch for this time. Hope yours is in it. If not, wait patiently; I don't intend to skip any one.

H. C., June 3, 1908—February, 1938.
Guardian, December 18, 1908—July, 1932.
H. Y., November 24, 1907—July, 1931.
M. L., March 18, 1912—October, 1935.
M. S., December 18, 1912—November, 1936.
C. A. M., March 6, 1912—February, 1939.
M. L., May 25, 1910—September, 1933.
P. V. T., August 12, 1903—October, 1931.
D. V. B., July 14, 1914—February, 1935.
L. A. D., October 17, 1907—January, 1934.
V. C. P., February 4, 1903—February, 1938.
T. M., July 16, 1910—January, 1935.
M. G., January 23, 1905—September, 1933.
M. H. G., April 11, 1903—February, 1936.
M. K., October 6, 1900—November, 1933.
H. B., April 29, 1908—September, 1932.
V. A. W., February 5, 1906—March, 1938.
A. G., April 16, 1903—March, 1936.
M. M. P., November 7, 1912—December, 1934.
L. M. E., February 22, 1909—January, 1939.
R. A., December 17, 1902—July, 1932.
M. B., January 16, 1912—April, 1937.
C. V., October 9, 1910—November, 1933.
L. P. H., December 20, 1881—July, 1932.
A. R. Y., April 29, 1902—September, 1932.
E. G., September 19, 1910—August, 1933.
L. N., December 17, 1911—November, 1936.
A. A., September 15, 1911—March, 1936.
J. K., March 18, 1910—August, 1933.
F. O., April 20, 1901—August, 1932.
K. S. H., April 8, 1909—January, 1936.
P. L. M., September 3, 1898—January, 1937.
K. S., August 28, 1895—September, 1932.
E. N., November 5, 1910—December, 1934.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after Nov. 20. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

E. G., September 13, 1910—November, 1932.
H. B., April 29, 1908—September, 1932.
N. M., January 5, 1909—October, 1932.
D. H. O., August 5, 1902—September, 1931.
F. L. D., April 17, 1905—July, 1932.
L. A., May 5, 1906—October, 1932.
F. E. E., May 17, 1912—August, 1933.
E. L., November 3, 1912—November, 1934.
R. D., November 11, 1910—January, 1935.
E. S., January 1, 1899—September, 1932.
L. E., April 9, 1913—February, 1936.
J. B., November 15, 1916—April, 1939.
N. F., August 28, 1905—December, 1936.
S. S., January 8, 1910—November, 1932.
R. B., July 4, 1912—December, 1934.
P. L., March 21, 1910—July, 1931.
E. C., June 17, 1913—September, 1934.
M. L., July 15, 1911—February, 1935.
M. C. B., September 29, 1910—October, 1933.
E. Y., February 23, 1908—October, 1934.
Roger, April 8, 1907—January, 1936.
B. K., September 28, 1905—October, 1933.
F. W. Z., November 28, 1909—June, 1939.
A. R. C., April 15, 1906—October, 1936.
F. P. B., September 22, 1909—September, 1933.
J. G., February 7, 1912—March, 1938.
M. C., June 20, 1911—October, 1934.
M. S., July 21, 1887—October, 1935.
S. H. O., January 18, 1910—August, 1933.
A. K., April 22, 1911—August, 1932.
L. S., May 31, 1914—January, 1938.
D. J. L., August 26, 1910—August, 1932.
S. S., December 11, 1908—October, 1931.
M. H., February 22, 1901—October, 1934.
M. E. W., March 12, 1905—January, 1935.
M. K., January 9, 1914—February, 1937.
N. K., October 22, 1908—October, 1934.
F. E. C. S., August 13, 1913—October, 1931.
W. A. K., January 17, 1908—April, 1937.
H. N., October 24, 1900—October, 1934.
M. M. Y., November 1, 1909—November, 1934.
E. B., March 12, 1907—May, 1931.
R. P., July 12, 1907—January, 1935.
G. V., January 26, 1908—October, 1933.

SELECTED

Mrs. V. H. K., born December 10, 1900, asks, "Will I always have to work?" Madam, my wish for you is that you may always be able to. There is no happiness without work. Learn that lesson well, and make your work a thing to be proud of—a monument to your industry.

You and your husband are coming into a tough year, Mrs. G. B., born January 5, 1906, but it can be weathered if you will remain cheerful, no matter what happens. It will be hard, but it will be worth it.

Oh, you poor, misguided woman! "At what age shall I expect my health to fail?" asks Mrs. F. L. R., born November 16, 1896. Don't you realize that you get out of this life a combination of what you expect and what you deserve? Any one who could ask such a question is throwing away priceless benefits of the future by looking for trouble. There is no need for your health ever to fail; and it won't if you are not afraid it will. I earnestly suggest that you do a lot of reading on the subject of mind over matter and then put as much of it as you can into practice.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR HANDWRITING ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after Nov. 29. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
—Character Analysis.
(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

Name.....

Street and No. .....

City..... State.....

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found on page 306.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

I HAVE heard it said, more than once, that gratitude is something that can be found only in the dictionary. If I had any such belief it is entirely dissipated. This has been brought about by the fact that during the past week I have received a tiny box of wedding cake all the way from Nebraska. I wish to thank my newly married friends in Omaha who sent me the cake. I only hope this good work will continue, for there is nothing like a little encouragement in this world. It makes the wheels of life go round much more smoothly, and certainly cheers the heart of yours truly. If I have helped you, don't hesitate to let me know. After all, "it is more blessed to give than to receive!"

Life is lived at such a high tension these days, I don't blame my readers for being forgetful about returning thanks for the little words of advice I send them from day to day. At the same time I'm old-fashioned enough to admit that it's a grand and glorious feeling when my correspondents take a tumble to my hints, and "say it with ink."

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

I have been reading some of
Rosemary
and must make haste to apologize
Alan

(Miss Rosemary McL., San Diego, Cal.) I thank you for the confidence you have placed in me, and I hope that my advice to you will be taken one hundred per cent. Like a great many of my correspondents, I see you need badly to be told a few things. My opinion of your boy friend Alan may be a little disappointing. No doubt he is very thoughtful and considerate, even to the point of bringing your mother and sister their week-end candy. That is all very manly and what a real sweetheart who hopes that one day he will be a member of the family should do. Alan may be all that and still be a rather poor partner and companion for you. Let me tell you what I see in his penmanship. First of all, he is hasty and quick-tempered. He is also very impatient and even childish when he doesn't get his own way. His propensity to talk is quite strong, and his love of exaggeration is all there, and then some! I grant you he is romantic and his gift of the gab is capable of charming you into the seventh heaven. But, Rosemary, you evidently overlook the fact that married life is not "all beer and skittles," as the saying is. By marrying Alan, you will have to shut your eyes to many things in his nature. If I were you, I would take a little more time to think things out before you say "Yes" to Alan.

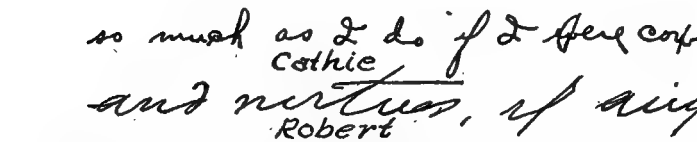
I would appreciate it very much
Martha
hopes of being an actor, see your fine
Bud

(Miss Martha H., Chicago, Ill.) Your choice of sweetheart might have been better, since you are rather superior in education to Bud. He is probably a very fine boy, as you state in your letter, but his education has been sadly neglected. You must know that yourself. Of course, I grant you it is not always the best educated people who make the best companions and lovers. It is the old story over again of love leveling everything. So if you are happy in Bud's company, by all means stick to him and help him the best way you can to gain that knowledge which evidently, for some reason, he has been denied. I see no reason why you two young folk should not be happy. You are both a good mixture of common sense and *uncommon* sense. So go to it, and I wish you the best of luck in your married life, if you decide that way.

pleased if you will give me
Agnes
but I would like to see what
Edward

(Miss Agnes R., Winnipeg, Man.) You cannot blame Edward for being the man he is. I would have thought you old enough to know men better than that. Your sweetheart has all the vim and energy of a real he-man, and when he "commands" you it is simply because he has the leadership qualities which you sadly lack. Though he is forceful, this boy friend of yours is not a bully. Far from it. He is just full of pep and anxious to make a name for himself. You, on the other hand, are inclined to sit back and let the rest of the world go by.

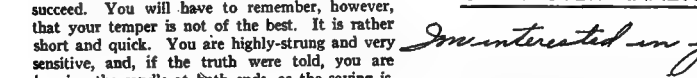
You and Edward evidently think the same as I do. It is quite obvious to me that you are a big-hearted and sympathetic girl. A real feminine girl, I would call you. You love to spend money, and then some, as well as talk a lot. Edward, on the other hand, doesn't talk very much, but he *thinks* a lot, and that's better. Since this boy is bucking up against several formidable obstacles, it is your duty to help him, rather than hinder him, by worrying over imaginary blemishes which your more slow thinking mind is formulating all the time. Think this over.



(Miss Cathie M., Burlington, Vt.) I was interested in what you told me in your letter. It is the old, old story that "true love never does run smooth." In the first place, Cathie, I think you have made a bad choice. However rich Robert's parents are, is that any guarantee that this boy is capable of making you happy when married? I'm afraid he isn't, judging by his pen strokes. In point of fact, there is nothing at all in common between you. Your outlook on life is entirely the reverse of Robert's. He loves worldly things better than the more worth-while things of life. No doubt many of your acquaintances would say that you are marrying for money. I would myself, and that's the main reason for my saying to you here that you are making a big mistake if you ever consent to marry this rich man's son.

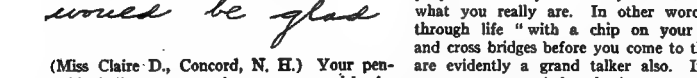
YOUR CAREER

(Miss Barbara F., Natchez, Miss.) You impress me as being a person who is cut out for big things. I like your straightforward ways. Your best bet would be some selling position which would bring you into contact with people. You are a splendid mixer and can command attention wherever you go. Your imaginative power is very pronounced—as well as your ability to talk! You have a convincing way with you, and as an outside representative you would be a "wow." You are not the sort who would take very well to domestic duties. Business is your forte, and in that particular line you have every chance to succeed. You will have to remember, however, that your temper is not of the best. It is rather short and quick. You are highly-strung and very sensitive, and, if the truth were told, you are burning the candle at both ends, as the saying is. You would do well to consider this before it is too late.



(Miss Claire D., Concord, N. H.) Your penmanship indicates to me that you are a girl who would be a great asset to a busy executive. You have all the earmarks of a cultured woman who knows her way about the world. Though you are still young—twenty-one—I have no hesitation in saying that you are capable beyond your years. Your honesty and sincerity of purpose are all that could be desired. Your outlook on life is wide and broad enough to make you an interesting person. You evidently are fond of talking, and you would do well to soft-pedal this propensity. You are also romantic and sentimental. Just enough to make you attractive and interesting to those around you. Your college career ought to come in handy, and your knowledge of business routine which you picked up when helping your uncle, should all mean much to you in the near future. Among your weaknesses I discover a strong tendency in your nature to spend money recklessly. I can clearly see that you are fond of living well, as well as looking well, and perhaps that accounts for your propensity to extravagance. A little more economy in the way you live would not be a bad idea. Remember the old adage that "wanton waste makes woeful want."

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



(Miss Mary O., Hamilton, Ont.) You appear to be a girl who possesses a very discriminating nature, one who can judge with care and precision. You are also very "touchy" and afraid that people will do you the injustice of telling you what you really are. In other words, you go through life "with a chip on your shoulder" and cross bridges before you come to them. You are evidently a grand talker also. In a word, you are a young lady who is pretty sure of herself. You can be very frank and open with those who differ with you. You call a spade a spade and don't waste time with too many preliminaries. Once your mind is made up, all the persuasion in the world won't change you. Your tastes lean toward the higher things in life. You are fond of poetry, music and art, and in addition to this you appreciate these things in a more than superficial way. Your honesty and sincerity are be-

yond reproach, and your sense of duty is far above the average. Altogether, I would call you a well poised girl who is capable of doing good work and accomplishing much in your lifetime.

(Miss Jessie T., Brooklyn, N. Y.) For a woman, you appear to have a very well developed sense of business and technical matters. You are also buoyant and full of optimism. I like the way you look at life. It is refreshing, with so many pessimists around. No one could call you vain. On the contrary, you are the essence of humility and never think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. Your greatest weakness is your extravagance. You love to spend money, and this liberality, I'm sure, has got you into lots of trouble. You are also self-sacrificing. I'm sure you have done much more for nothing than you have ever been paid for. Your business sense, which I have already referred to, ought to be the means of placing you in some responsible position in the commercial world. As a matter of fact, it is of little consequence what you undertake, you are likely to make a success of it. Your handwriting has been a pleasure to analyze. I wish you the best of luck.

For the coupon entitling you to John Fraser's services, turn to page 306

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Love Makes a Touchdown.....

Holliday Hearts .....

A Man Without Mercy.....

Navy Blues .....

An Offer of Marriage.....

Another Man's Kiss .....

Four Star Girl.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES MERION MORTON

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have a little matter that I feel sure you can help me to settle. I have been reading your page for a good many months and have been impressed by your advice to these people who need it. I find myself among those now, and hasten to write to you.

My brother, who is two years older than I, has become infatuated with a chorus girl at a well-known theater in this town. I am quite certain that she is a bad egg and is only taking advantage of my brother's weakness. We, my brother and I, have been the closest pals for twenty-two years, but he resents my attitude toward this girl. He will not listen to me, nor to any one else, and I fear that I may make an error should I try more drastic methods. I hope you will have a solution to my problem, which you can see, is a very delicate one. If you care to publish my letter, I would not object as long as you omit my full name.

CALIFORNIA ADMIRER.

The very best thing you can do is *not interfere.* Such an infatuation as your brother's only thrives on opposition. I once knew a very wise woman who was heartbroken over her son's entanglement with just such a girl as you describe. Do you know what she did? She invited that girl into her home; she made much of her; she threw her at the young man's head until he was sick of her. Without having it pointed out to him, when he saw her in his own environment he realized the differences between her and the women and girls he had been brought up with. Some people might say this was a very hypocritical thing for the mother to do, but if the girl had been worthy —if she had even known how to *act* like a lady, to pretend she was one, she would not have lost him.

Your mother may not feel like doing anything like this, even if you are both living with her. But reasoning with a mad love is useless—as you may one day learn yourself. Give him his head. Don't run her down to him. Trust his good sense to come to his rescue in time. If, meanwhile, you can offer plans with the right sort of girl that will hold his interest, if you can arrange the right sort of fun, ask him to help you out occasionally in the evenings with a blind date (a date, needless to say, that you know will not be a bore), so much to the good. I don't know

anything else you could do except rush the girl yourself—and that might prove disastrous.

Boy, we all have to make our own lives, and learn our own lessons. Your brother cannot be taught by anybody's experience but his own. Even if it comes to marriage you must console yourself with the thought that in this generation marriages do not necessarily last, and even a wretched one need not spoil a life.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Perhaps you can find a solution to my sad problem, and if you can it would mean so much to me. I have been in love with a young man three years my junior for almost three years and I am as much in love now as I was at the first. It was a case of love at first sight on my part, and even he confessed that he had loved me a long time before he was aware of the fact.

For one year and a half we were utterly happy and inseparable, declaring our undying love for each other and planning our future marriage when we should be out of college. Our love was the finest and most sacred thing I have ever known. It was just too deep to explain to any one and he seemed to be as much in love with me as I was with him.

Then the inevitable had to happen in the form of his parents' disapproval of our marriage. His boy friends also became jealous because I took him away from them so much and broke up their "gang" as it were, causing us to quarrel. The quarrel began gradually and ended a few months later in a grand battle. I was heartbroken and lived in misery for the next ten months, at the end of which we partially patched up our quarrel and began seeing each other again. My lover (seemingly) loved me just as much as ever, but things were so different from before and while we, at first, had held perfect confidence in each other we no longer expressed our love as we had once done. This put me in a state of uncertainty, never knowing if he loved me still or not.

Things were all right until his pal again became jealous and tried everything possible to keep us apart, which resulted in long intervals between his visits to me. That state of affairs has continued ever since. At times I believe he loves me and the same old uncertainty takes its place again. Then I believe he really loves me, but he is so easily influenced by his pal that he doesn't know his own mind. He has never renewed his proposal of marriage and I am forever in pain wondering if he still loves me and if some time he will ask me again. I shall never be happy without him and am in constant agony due to his indifference. How can I find out for sure if he does love me and how can I regain that old confidence and be happy?

BROKENHEARTED NETTIE.

You do not tell me how old you are. In your twenties, I suppose—not that it makes much difference. Dear, I know how hard it is to be so uncertain and unhappy over some one we love, or believe we love. But if this man is so easily led away, and if he is not man enough to stand up for you—if his love is not strong enough to make him know what he wants, do you really want *him?* You must not tell yourself that you will never be happy without him, for we none of us know what is waiting for us just around the next corner of our journey through the world. Perhaps you will learn some day that he is not the love of your life at all, that this love has only been a preparation for a bigger, finer feeling. You see, the love and suffering itself will help you to grow into a bigger, better woman, and you will have a greater capacity for loving than you have now. Besides, what does love amount to without trust, and how can you trust a person such as you describe him to be?

The only thing for you to do is not to let him be too sure of you. Don't let him think that he can come when he pleases, and go when he pleases, drop you whenever he feels like it and you will be waiting to be picked up again. Don't let him see you every time he wants to; don't let him take you so much for granted. Men never value what they can have for the asking, so a little wholesome doubt about your feelings will be good for him. I know it will be hard for you—it will mean being calm and self-controlled when you don't feel that way at all; it will mean concealing your true feelings when you want to express them, and hiding your heartache. But in the end it will be better. Try to believe me, dear. I have seen it so many times, both in my own personal life, among my friends, and through the letters that have come to my department. Yet I know it is difficult, if not impossible, to reason love away, or to learn from another's experience. Girls have to learn their own lessons, often with bitter tears.

Don't let him make a date whenever he feels like it; have something else on hand. Put him off. Go out with other friends; try to fill your time with other things, that will help you to bridge the gap his defection must leave in your life for a time. The fact that he is three years younger than you has nothing to do with it. If he were a mature man, and a wise one, he would recognize it, and not let any one so silly as to bring it up as an objection influence him. Real love is strong, not weak; it knows what it wants and goes after it—is not blown about by every wind of other people's opinion. You could never be happy together, even if married, unless he straightens up and shows more strength of character than he has now.

I have no touchstone of magic for you, Nettie; all I can do is try to point out to you that life is worth living even when we can't have the thing we think we want. Later on you may look back on all this and wonder that you let him cost you so much more than he is worth. Whatever happens, it won't hurt you to be dignified in your bearing, and use a little of the good old woman's strategy to let him believe he has lost you by his actions, as he deserves to have lost you, and let him do a little of the wondering.

There's nothing more beautiful in the world than being married to the man you love—but he must be a *man*.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

We are just another couple on the verge of making the great plunge. I am nineteen and Archie is twenty. Sounds rather young, I suppose, but what we lack in years, we make up in experience. Our parents have no objections. While Archie's salary is small, he has good prospects ahead and consequently a higher salary. We are young and healthy and want to get an early start toward a home of our own, a little car and one or two children. We are perfectly frank with each other and have tried to study out the whole thing, and we can see no reason why we shouldn't get married. Archie says he would then have something definite in view for which to work. We have six hundred dollars saved which, although it isn't so much, will give us a start.

There is one thing worrying me about which I have said nothing to Archie. This is it—I have a good position and earn as much as he does. Now I know what will happen when we are married and I want it to be that way; I will have to stop working and every one says I will certainly miss the little old pay envelope. Certainly I will. That is natural, but I am willing to miss it for him. This is the real issue: I am so independent after working two years, that is, since I graduated from high school, that I dread the thought of accepting money from Archie, even though I know I will be earning it the same as if I were working here at the office.

Perhaps that will come naturally in time, but just now it stares me in the face like a huge monster. We are very much in love and that is all that seems to matter to every one. We are trying to figure the whole thing out before dashing madly into marriage, so any advice you can give us will be greatly appreciated. But please don't tell us to wait. I do not go out with any one else, of course, and don't want to as I have gone out with the crowd since I was fourteen. My mother died when I was twelve and I have been practically on my own since then.

YOUNG LOVERS.

If you were both a little older I would say that whether you should keep on working after marriage depends on your own inclination. If you are domestic, it would be better to stay at home. If you like business life better than housework perhaps it would be wiser to keep on going to business. However, I want to warn you that the average woman who does this soon teaches her husband to expect her to support herself and even the inevitable third. The man does not very long consider that his wife is doing anything but what she ought to do. In plain English, he does not appreciate the sacrifices and effort that she makes.

However, you are not a man and woman. *You* are old enough to be married, perhaps, but no boy of twenty should be taken seriously. It is up to you to jolly him out of it if he takes himself seriously. I don't expect you to pay any attention to what I say. As has been remarked before, we all have to learn from experience, more or less bitter. However, I am saying this to ease my own conscience because I have yet to see a marriage contracted when the boy was a callow youth, not even of age, which was a success.

Marriage will handicap him, prevent his advancement, make it impossible for him to take chances that he could if alone, and in the end he will hold it up against you because a girl of nineteen is older and should be wiser than a boy of the same age. I don't want to throw cold water, but you ask me for my frank opinion and this is it. I wish you well even if you do not follow my advice.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am writing to see if you could help me with my problem. I am eighteen years old, and live with my own mother and stepfather. My stepfather is very miserable to me. He keeps picking on me. I have a younger sister and brother, but he picks on them a little, but not like me. I want so much to run away, but I really love mother so much, I just know it would hurt her.

I have a wonderful boy friend who thinks the world of me. He would gladly take me away and marry me if only he had enough money, the poor kid. Bob, my boy friend, does so much for my stepfather and mother, and never even gets a thank you. He has learned to hate my father almost as much as I have.

Mother is told by my father to ask Bob if he will take him and her out whenever we go. He doesn't mind taking mother, but my father he can't stand. He says so many miserable things about me, when we have company, that I have to get up and walk out of the room, embarrassed. The things are all lies, but I think he just likes to show off. Mother often says if I would not pay any attention to him, but it is hard, Mrs. Morton, sometimes, when he says things to cut you to the heart.

My mother finds no fault as far as she is concerned. She, of course, would not find any in the one she loves. He treats her wonderful, but it just seems to be he can't care for me. I sometimes think it is because I have a grandmother on my own father's side who thinks the world of me, ever since I was a small child. She does so many things for me; there is nothing she wouldn't do for me. He keeps saying I am spoiled, and that my grandmother doesn't do things for the others as much as for me. My grandmother has asked me to come and live with her, but I don't like to leave mother, although she is getting to be almost the same way, because she is around my stepfather.

Please, Mrs. Morton, tell me what to do, I am so undecided. Shall I wait until my boy friend can marry me—that will be at least two years—or shall I go away? Please tell me; I sure will appreciate it.

MISSY OF DETROIT.

It may not help to be told that most people have something to put up with in their lives. Of course life is too short to spend it indefinitely

under the same roof with such an uncongenial and disagreeable personality as your stepfather evidently is. On the other hand, you are only a young girl and are better off at home with your mother than you would be somewhere else.

No doubt you now imagine that when Bob is ready to marry you, life will be nothing but one grand sweet song. Unfortunately, most people find out that married life is something very different. You will have difficulties of one sort or another to face, compromises and adjustments to make, and if you have formed the habit of running away from your difficulties as you would if you left home now, they would be all the harder to cope with later on. I think you should try to do as your mother says and disregard her husband's trying ways to the very best of your ability. Ignore him! Men are, after all, very much like little boys. If they find out that they can tease you they will do it to the top of your bent; if you refuse to be annoyed they will soon stop and try to find an easier victim. It is the same way with this man. If you don't let him see so readily that he annoys and embarrasses you, he won't find half as much fun in his unkindness.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am writing to ask your advice hoping that I don't take up much of your time. I am nineteen years of age and going with a fellow one year and a half. He never wanted to take me any place except a cheap show or over to his aunt's; if I didn't want to go he wanted to stay home in my house. I used to see him four nights a week. Then we were supposed to be married and at the last moment he backed out. How do you think I felt? Then he started cutting down on the dates. Do you think he has anybody else, as I have been true to him? He gave me a couple of stand-ups lately. Some of my friends are telling me to give him up, because he drinks once in a while. They say I will find some one better—do you think so? I love him so much I hate to give him up. Besides, my mother doesn't want me to give him up because he is of the same religion as we are.

WEARY HEART.

This fellow is not worth all the worry he is causing you. He hasn't one of the traits that make for happiness in marriage, and you should be glad you are getting rid of him, instead of feeling so broken-hearted about it.

Child, do you think that he would be different if you were married? He would be worse, if anything! He would still be lazy and stingy and false and unreliable—and what sort of life would his wife have? The fact that you belong to the same church would never make up to you for his lack of character. There are plenty of nice boys of your religion who would respect you, and respect themselves, and be worth loving. *He* is not. I'd never make another date with him, if I were you. It is an insult for a man to stand a girl up like that, a deliberate affront, and the first time he did it should have been the last. Put him out of your life as speedily as possible, Catherine; it won't take long to put him out of your thoughts when you don't see him any more. And wait a little until you know a few nicer men, men who do not drink, men who will be generous to you and kind to you, men whose word you can trust.

Carmen—Sometimes we take it hard, don't we? And the younger we are the harder we take it, because we have nothing to compare it with. A child cries at things that seem foolish to grown-ups, because they compromise his whole little world, and he does not know that they are comparatively unimportant. And, in the same way, when you are a bit older you will realize that you would not have been so unhappy, and cried so much, at eighteen, if you had been able to see your little love affair in its true perspective.

The only thing for you to do is to be friendly and pleasant with the boy when you see him, and try to put him out of your mind when he is not there. He is only kidding; he does not mean nor want to be taken seriously; don't give yourself away and let him think that you do. We can all conquer an unwelcome affection if we will—by *filling* our minds with other things. Throw yourself into some hobby; study some special course at school; cultivate your other friends—all these things will help you to get over the boy. For you'll get over it, dear; we all do, and live to tell the tale. You'll probably be in and out of love half a dozen times before you're really ready to settle down—I hope you will. There's nothing sadder than to see a girl get married too young, for in nine cases out of ten she doesn't realize in the least what she is in for, and there is only unhappiness ahead.

SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR

THERE'S going to be a banner issue of ALL-STORY for the Thanksgiving season, an issue just crammed to the covers with extra good stories by many of the best beloved authors of love stories now living.

To begin with, Betty Trevor's "Parted by the Dead" begins in the November 29th issue of the magazine. We don't need to say anything more about "Parted by the Dead," because if ever a story was written to create a furor of enthusiasm, this one is! It's the most fascinating tale you've read this year—or any other year, we predict. Out of the past, which had held such hopeless sorrow and frustration for two hearts before kindly death removed the barrier between, rose a ghostly hand—to point with awesome accusation at the happy young bridegroom while a voice from the dead proclaimed him murderer!

In this list of four-star treats for love story fans there's a story for every taste. And just look at the galaxy of writing stars:

Cupid on the Gridiron
By Ethel Donohey

Football—the big game of the season—with love as goal

The Wishing Gate
By Hagar Wilde

A loved author with a lovable tale

Midnight Madness
By I. Baird Richards

If you're a Lindbergh fan, you'll love Tod Brinker—and his lovely little Nemesis

Sandra Gives Thanks
By Jane Littell

Thanksgiving comes to hearts in Hollywood

The Street of Closed Doors
By Una Bunker

A tiny ivory elephant opens the door to Paradise

An Offer of Marriage
By Berta Ruck

The thrilling last instalment of this absorbing love story

AND A HOST OF OTHER TREATS TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION

Remember! Copies of ALL-STORY go like hot-cakes the minute they reach the stands, so if you don't put the date on your calendar you're liable to miss yours. Be on hand November 26th—early.

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask Mrs. Dale for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am a boy of twenty, dark brown hair and eyes, five and a half feet tall. I work in an office, but am not a sissy. I love to swim, hike and do all kinds of outdoor sports, as well as write. Very anxious for pen pals.

JACK OF WASHINGTON.

I have no brothers or sisters and am very, very lonely. I'm thirteen, light hair and blue eyes, and will answer E-V-E-R-Y letter that comes my way. I don't care if I get a thousand a day for ten weeks! For the first two I have a surprise, so come and get it!

INEZ OF WEST VIRGINIA.

We haven't lived here very long and I don't know any one but my parents. I'm a blonde and like singing, dancing and letter writing. If you want to know more about me write

BLUE EYES OF MISSOURI.

I'm a girl of fifteen, reddish hair and brown eyes. The sports I like best are swimming and hiking, also enjoy the movies, radio and dancing. I was born to be a wisecracker and live up to the name, though I really can't help it. I'm a freshman in high and like it, and am much interested in the West and different countries.

JERSEY.

I'm twenty, five feet one, brown curly hair and blue eyes. Girls are scarce around here, so I find it rather lonesome. I like the out of doors best and am happiest in the canoe or saddle.

JUDY OF ALBERTA.

Another blue-eyed Irish girl waiting for letters. I've traveled a bit, so any one replying will receive a prompt, interesting answer. Won't you take a chance and write? APRIL.

I'm a boy sixteen, five feet eight, dark brown hair, brown eyes, and wanting some one to write to me. My hobbies are swimming, football, baseball, and writing. LONESOME FLORIDAN.

I'm sixteen, five feet six, fair skin, blond wavy hair. I'm very fond of books and can write interesting letters. I'd like to have girls write to me from everywhere, even my own city. Thank you very much for letting me come into your club. I didn't write before because I was afraid no one would answer, but perhaps some one will.

LONESOME ANNE, Philadelphia.

Just a Kansas girl with dark hair, blue eyes, five feet three, seventeen years of age. I'm one of these modern girls, enjoy a good time and am out to get all out of life that I can. My weakness is letter writing. JUST MARGIE.

I'd appreciate very much your printing my letters. I want to hear from girls all ages, far

Go gle

or near. I'm twenty-four, a dancer, singer, piano player. I have a girl five years old. Auburn hair, dark blue eyes, love shows, all sports, have traveled quite a bit. E. B.

Big cities or small, there's always some one that's lonesome. Here's how I look—blonde, blue eyes, fair complexion, five feet three, twenty-two, fond of all sports. Should anybody care to write to me it would be a big help, for I can't express my lonesomeness. SNOOKUMS.

Give me a break, pen pals! I'm a twenty-four-year-old guy who has the wanderlust, five feet eight, dark hair, gray eyes, and for looks, well, just write and you'll get a photo so you can see. I've traveled through a number of States and have some wonderful pictures. Our mail carrier doesn't carry the mail, so don't worry about him. ILLINOIS AL.

I love to write letters, and of course receive them. I'm a snappy girl of sixteen, blue eyes and sorta wavy hair, five feet three, love all sports, especially dancing and swimming. I play hockey and basket ball and enjoy them very much. ANGIE OF N. Y.

I'm a young man of twenty-two, interested in dancing. I teach ballroom and tap. I have dark brown hair, blue eyes, five feet ten, weigh 160. I wish to write to men only and would especially like to hear from ones in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas—fellows fifteen to ninety. After dancing, I am interested in swimming, singing, skating, love scenery, books and motoring. I love art, too. Gee! I hope I get lots of letters—I promise to answer all.
HARRY FROM "THE LAND OF A MILLION SMILES."

I'd love to receive letters from the Hawaiian Islands, the Southern States, and just everywhere. I'm eighteen, dark brown hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, five feet three and full of fun. I love all kinds of sports. Some one who rides horseback please write to me; I'm crazy about it, but I've never been on a horse. I sure like Hawaiian music and dancing. WILDFLOWER.

A young married woman of twenty-three, have four children. Brown eyes and hair, five feet five, weigh nearly 200. My husband works nights and I do get lonely; I'd love to hear from other women with children. I love reading, writing, movies, music and any kind of sport. I live in the country and haven't many friends here. LONELY PICKY.

Writing to the Lonesome Club although I'm not lonely. Sixteen, gray eyes, brown wavy hair, five feet five, athletics-crazy, and brown as an Indian from swimming all summer. I'm right there when there's any deviltry to be done, always getting into something. I love football, basket ball and hockey. I know how to yell, too, because I was cheer leader two years. Come on, all athletic girls and cheer leaders. First letter will get snap of my sun tan. Snap it up now! STRIPES.

I'm a boy eighteen, dark-headed, good-looking, would like to hear from the West. I'll be waiting for a letter, for I'm lonesome for a pen pal. FRANCIS FROM DETROIT.

I'm fifteen, golden-brown hair, bluish-green eyes, light complexion, five feet four, love all sports, dancing and reading. I haven't any close pen pals and am anxious for some. Have I gained my way to your writing paper? PUFF OF CONN.

My hobby is traveling, but my experiences have been limited to California, New Mexico, Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon. I know California by heart from border to border, am a member of the Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, eligible to N. D. G. State organization. I'm seventeen, a senior in high, modern, but don't uphold smoking for women or drinking for either men or women. Like dancing and all sports, especially golf and tennis. I have dark brown wavy hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, five feet six and enough flesh to tip the scales at 150. Let's hear from every one—it will cost only four cents to get acquainted. Travelers, come—every one else, too. Letter writing is a hobby of TRIXIE OF THE GOLDEN STATE.

I'm seventeen, brown hair, gray eyes, fair complexion, five feet four. I'm a lover of all sports and, above all, dancing. Come on, everybody. I have lots of news for those who write to CUTIE OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

A lonesome marine, five feet ten, eighteen years old, curly hair, good-looking. So if you have a place reserved for me in ALL-STORY I'll be pleased very much. AUBREY OF CUBA.

Dear Mrs. Dale,
I'd like lots of mail,
So I'd like to get in your club.
I'm just twenty-four,
And I'm glad I'm no more,
But I'm lonesome, there is the rub.
Please find me some pals.
Lots of nice gals,
Who are married and live in the subs.
And I'll guarantee
All letters sent me
Shall be answered till pencils are stubs.
LILLIAN, PA.

I live in the country, enjoy all sports, like to see shows and dance. I'm twenty-six, not hard to look at—dark brown hair and eyes, six feet tall. Don't fail me. LONESOME RICHARD.

Who wants to write to a regular fellow, free, white and twenty-five? Is interested in anything. Haven't traveled a great deal, but life, if it has lacked adventure, has never lacked color. Am neither lonesome nor blue, but any one who is friendless and alone, wanting a regular pal, tune in. Am not exactly Hollywood's loss, but guess I'd pass. Height, six feet, weight, about 165. BUDDY OF MASS.

Just a lonesome soldier, nineteen, five feet nine, brown hair and eyes, ruddy complexion. I weigh

just 140 because I'm a runner in all track meets we have here. I'm also supposed to be the champion two-mile runner, with the time of eleven minutes, ten and four-fifths seconds. I've traveled quite a little, so I can tell some good stories, and I'll answer every letter "pronto."

MATTY OF N. Y.

I'm five feet five, green eyes, dark blond hair, fair complexion, weigh 129. I love all sports, will exchange snaps and presents with everybody from everywhere. LONESOME LORRIE.

I'd like some pen pals as I live alone on a chicken farm. Am five feet eleven, weigh about 175, blue eyes, light brown hair, fair disposition, like all good clean sports.

ACE OF MISSISSIPPI.

Twenty, not pretty but considered attractive, dark hair and eyes, light complexion, also quite tall—five feet eight. I like people who are sensible and home loving; good looks do not matter.

RUBY OF LONG ISLAND.

Am in land of Great Khan and would love to exchange letters and photos with any one, great, small, tall, but not short. Am a girl of seventeen, five feet four, weigh 116, light hair, dark green eyes, love swimming, hockey, dancing and also books. Come along, let me hear from you, my pen pals. OLD SAM OF CHINA.

I live in England, in a priory our family have owned since the early 1600's. The house and gardens are open to the public one day each month, and I'm always delighted when some of the visitors are Americans because it is a pleasure to see their appreciation of old things. Of course there are stories of family ghosts, but I've never seen one, although the servants tell tales of "hearing things." I have traveled a great deal and know France and Italy well, speak both languages. I was in America before the Great War and some of the most delightful days of my life were spent on a small ranch in Kansas. I shall never forget. For that reason I'd be so pleased to hear from any one, young or old, who lives on a farm or ranch in the West. I'll exchange snapshots or send post cards of London or, if I happen to be abroad, of France and Italy. I can write on any subject from pruning fruit trees to Paris fashions. I am not sixteen, nor yet double that, but I do not think age matters greatly between pen pals, do you? LOVER OF WESTERN LIFE.

Won't some one write me? I'm working in a business office and work nights. It gets mighty lonesome around midnight. So I'll be mighty glad to have letters to write. Am five feet four, brown curly hair and brown eyes. Love to swim and usually do my swimming in Lake Michigan.

PEP OF INDIANA.

Would any of your readers care to write to a girl in New Zealand who is desirous of having pen friends all over the world? I am a typist, twenty-one years of age, have fair hair, am five feet two, and am interested in anything, especially dancing, swimming, skating and football. I'd love any one to write; all letters answered; am fond of the ALL-STORY. M. OF N. Z.

A lonely girl looking for friends, light brown hair and light blue eyes and about five feet high. I live now in town, but am just a poor country girl, so I get lonesome. I cannot tell in a letter what I like to do, but you can guess what a country girl does to spend her time in the country. So come on and make a lonely girl happy. I would like to write to people from twenty to twenty-seven. I have lots of time to write.

SUSIE OF FLORIDA.

I wonder if any one would be nice enough to write to me. I'm five feet one, gray, always laughing eyes, brown, very curly boyish-bobbed hair, quite nice teeth and fair complexion. My nickname is Ginger Tea; you will find out if you condescend to write to me, myself and I, which equals at least three letters. I'm almost thirteen and going into eighth grade. I love to swim, that's natural to any one, am full of fun and love to have it, but so far I've not had it very often. I am in the Glee Club and have written several stories in our school papers. I'm a "hit" with some teachers and then there's the few who would like to hit me. Tut, tut! But I mustn't tell my naughty "virtues," for you mightn't like me then. GINGER TEA.

Now the long winter evenings are coming it's a joy to send and receive letters. I hope lots of friends write to me. I am married, twenty-three, have two kiddies, a girl and a boy. I like to take pictures, so will be glad to exchange photos. NEBRASKA PAL.

Have been reading ALL-STORY for a long time and decided to write to you. I am five feet ten, twenty-three, dark red hair and blue eyes and fond of everything, especially aviation. Can do anything. FLYING RED.

I'm sixteen, five and one-half feet tall, have golden hair and blue eyes. I'd especially like to hear from some one in Hollywood. My one ambition is to become an actress.

ANTOINETTE OF N. J.

May I have just a tiny bit of your space and time? I am five feet five, dark brown hair and eyes. I'm interested in everything, especially dancing, swimming, theater, reading and sports. Would enjoy getting letters from any one between eighteen and thirty-eight. Pals all over the world, write to SANDY OF VERMONT.

I am seventeen, five feet four, brown curly hair and blue eyes, I love to dance, swim and play tennis. I play a violin and piano. Come on, everybody, and write to

LONESOME OF MICHIGAN.

Is there room for another lonesome girl in your club? I am seventeen, have blue eyes and brown hair and am usually happy. But lately that happy smile has faded. And instead I sit and look into space. The blues! It has come to me at last. Ah, girls, you who have heartaches to con-

tend with, I sympathize with you, and all you happy-go-lucky lassies, how about a few lines to cheer us up? ONCE HAPPY.

I sure would love you to get some young men in and around Chicago or any part of the earth for me. I'll answer every letter and exchange snapshots. I also have a very nice motion picture camera and if at any time I should meet any of my pen pals I sure will make some movies of them. Then I can always have them. I am twenty-five, five feet six, dark brown curly hair and blue eyes and am always full of fun and in for a good time. Please, Mrs. Dale, don't forget me. I wish you the best of luck in your department and sure like ALL-STORY very much—wish it was every week.

FRANK OF CHICAGO.

May I join your club? I am lonesome and wish some pen pals, married or single, between seventeen and twenty-five. I am twenty-one, married, brown hair and gray eyes, five feet four. I came from Buffalo about three months ago, to Hollywood. I see the actors and actresses occasionally, as my friends work at the studio. A very dear friend of mine is an actress and chorus girl. JEANNE OF HOLLYWOOD.

Everybody move over and make room for a lonesome show girl, will you? I have spent three seasons in stock and one in vaudeville. I am in Montana trying to get over a nervous breakdown, so this is a mighty lonesome season for me. I have been in every State in the Union and three foreign countries. Can't you imagine it out here in the sagebrush away from the noisy, hurrying crowd? Away from the bright lights? Looks? Oh, yes! I am blue-eyed, blond and have fair complexion. Am twenty-one, five feet six; my hobby is dancing, also singing. Also love to read and write letters. I promise to answer every letter I get, so get busy, folks.

LONESOME DANCER.

I am a young girl of eighteen and would like to have some pen pals. I am in my second college year, so all of you who would like to hear about school activities, write. A few years ago I spent the whole summer in Europe and shall gladly tell you of my reminiscences. I have blond hair, dark brown eyes, and am quite tall and slender.

RAYE C. OF INDIANA.

I am sixteen, brown hair and eyes, five feet one. I am in my last year in high school—just a lonesome kid in a small town. Come on, kids, get out the pens and write.

LONESOME BOOTS, N. Y.

Now I wonder if some nice person will write to me. I'll be interested in most anything (all but cooking). I like to correspond, and, best of all, with some one I don't know. I have curly auburn hair, dark brown eyes with long lashes, fair complexion. I'm seventeen, five feet three or four and weigh 118. I like every kind of sport there is, even to falling out of airplanes with parachutes, etc. Oh, yes! I live in Canada now. CHARMAINE.

A girl of sixteen, five feet tall, weigh 94. I have dark hair and gray eyes. I like all sports. Will some one please write to me?

LONESOME OF GEORGIA.

A girl of eighteen, light hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, five feet five. I am fond of all sports; also reading, drawing and painting. But I especially like to receive and answer letters.

JO OF INDIANA.

I am terribly lonesome. I am five feet two, eyes of blue and will soon be eighteen, but I will not refuse one letter that I receive. I am a lover of all sports, including miniature golf, baseball, basket ball and dancing. I will be patient, because I believe you can help me.

LONESOME LOU OF WISCONSIN.

I am sixteen, blond, blue-eyed and lonely. I am a mixture of English and German and have lived both in England and Germany, so you can be sure I will have some interesting things to write about. I'll answer any letter in English or German.

EDNA OF LONDON.

For a long time I've been reading your section of ALL-STORY and trying to get enough courage to answer an ad or send in one of my own. At last I'm going to attempt it. I am fifteen, a junior in high school, have dark brown hair and blue eyes and am five feet two. I play the Hawaiian steel guitar. I also dance and swim a little, and like to read. I would like to have pen pals from all over, but especially from Hawaii.

PAT OF OHIO.

I am another ALL-STORY reader and would love to have correspondents from other points and, as I don't know them, I think it would be quite interesting. I have lived in Mexico all my life and Spanish is my language. I speak it all day long, though really I'm German, but don't know German. I studied English for four years; that's why I know it and speak it rather well. I am five feet four, weigh about 116, light hair and green eyes. I like all sports, specially tennis, swimming, dancing. I can tell anything about Mexico they want to know. I am not lonesome, because I have plenty of friends, but love to get letters! EMMY OF MEXICO.

I've just moved out here and am very lonesome. I'm a girl of seventeen, dark brown hair, light blue eyes, love all indoor and outdoor sports.

JO OF MICHIGAN.

I'm a blonde with blue eyes, five feet two, eighteen, a senior in high school. I like all kinds of sports, dances and parties. I am very sociable.

MARION OF ILLINOIS.

I am thirty, six feet tall and weigh 185. I have brown eyes and hair and am still single. I play baseball and basket ball and like to dance. Come one and all and write to

RALPH OF SUNNY CALIFORNIA.

I am blond with curly hair, nineteen, like all kinds of sports, especially football, baseball, volley

ball, basket ball. I like to go to dances and parties; I like a lot of friends, but true friends and stay friends.

PEGGY OF ILLINOIS.

I'm eighteen, extremely blond, and I have plenty of spare time which I'd like to use in writing to pen pals. I have a surprise for you, too, so come on, you lively ones, and write to

UNDECIDED BLONDIE.

Just eighteen, very interested in dancing and very fond of the movies and stars, so will all you dancers or any of you fellows who know something about the stage please write to me?

STAGESTRUCK KID.

Am nineteen, six feet tall, weigh 165, brown wavy hair and not too bad-looking. Am a four-letter man in college, so am interested in all athletics, especially basket ball and football. Love to dance, swim and tear around the country to meet people. It's terribly lonesome here and I'd appreciate having some one write to me (not one, lots). Have souvenirs of all over the world for the first who write. (Don't write, telegraph!)

BIG MAN FROM THE NORTH.

Just another girl who wants lots of pals. Twenty-three, black hair and brown eyes, five feet six, enjoy all kinds of sports, especially dancing. I prefer letters from my home town, Chicago.

HELENE.

I am a girl of fifteen, brown hair and blue eyes and fair complexion. I love ALL-STORY and read the Lonesome Club first, and wonder if some of the girls would write to me. I'm interested in most anything and very fond of dancing.

JIMMIE OF MISSOURI.

FOR YOUR OWN ROOM

A very few more complete sets of the "Betty-Lou" series of covers, published during the summer, are still available to ALL-STORY readers. The full set of six pictures, in two tone reproductions, will be sent, as long as they last, to any one whose request is accompanied by five cents in stamps. Be sure to get your request in early, for Neysia Alban's lovely drawings are wanted by every one who prizes beauty. Just address your letter: To the Editors, ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, 280 Broadway, New York City.